OCT. 9, 1926 EVERY WEEK 15 Cents

Western Story Magazine

BIG CLEAN STORIES OF OUTDOOR LIFE

Max Brand
Arthur Preston Hankins
Frank Richardson Pierce
George Gilbert
Ernest Haycox
Austin Hall

STREET & SMITH PUBLICATION

NOW FREE

B. W. COOKE Directing Engineer

B. W. Cooke's FREE TRIAL

6 AUTO Instruction JOBS

CLIP COUPON

5 BIG OUTFITS Free OF EXTRA COST

EARN up to $150 a Week!

If you're earning a cent less than $60 a week, *clip coupon now.* Get the **PROOF** that you can be on your way to BIG PAY as an Auto Expert QUICK! *See for yourself* how *fascinating* this training is—how easily you can master Auto Work right in your own home—and how **quickly** you can get in line for the **big Auto Jobs** that pay up to **$150 a week and more**—or a Money-Making Auto Business of your own! Remember these Instruction jobs come to you **ABSOLUTELY FREE** and without obligation. **Clip coupon now.**

I'll train you AT HOME

Get these free Instruction Jobs now. See how thorough, how complete "JOB-WAY" Training is—includes all Electrical work—Ignition, Starting, Lighting—all Mechanical, also Welding, Brazing, Vulcanizing—also Business Course, Salesmanship, Advertising—How to keep simple Books—also Students' Magazine, also 5 working Outfits. Nowhere else can you get this original genuine, copyrighted B. W. Cooke "JOB-WAY" Training.

This Big Auto Book Also FREE

Coupon brings this startling, revolutionary Auto Book, too, absolutely Free! Shows how hundreds of men have reached Big Pay in amazingly quick time! Shows what you can do. Send for it now!

SEND ME LESSONS and BOOK FREE

B. W. COOKE, 1916 Sunnyside Ave., Dept. 767 Chicago

Send me absolutely FREE and without any obligation on my part, 6 Auto Instruction Jobs. Also your Auto Book FREE and full particulars of your 5 Outfits Offer.

Name .....

Address .....

Town ..... State .....

TO PROVE that "JOB-WAY" is "PAY-RAISE" Training

Clip coupon now. I'll send you **absolutely FREE OF CHARGE**—with positively *no obligation* on your part—**6 "JOB-WAY" Instruction JOBS!** and my big book. I want you to *SEE for yourself* just why "JOB-WAY" Training is bringing so many men **Big Money** in such *remarkably quick time.* I want you to see how men *without a day's previous auto experience*—and only *common schooling* become Garage Owners, Superintendents, Managers, and earn up to **$150 a week** and more! I want you to see why Hundreds of men have found "JOB-WAY" Training to be such interesting, most practical money-making training!

That's why I make you this unusual offer—with absolutely no strings on it and **not a single penny's charge.** Clip coupon now and I'll rush your jobs to you *absolutely Free!*

Coupon Brings Full Details of My 5 OUTFITS OFFER

Includes Tools, Tool Bag, Electrical Test Bench and Radio Receiving Set—all Equipment. Also 303 Wiring Diagram Charts, also Socket Wrench and Ignition Wrench sets.

Be An Auto Expert

The World's Biggest Business Needs You!

There are so many **tremendous Opportunities** in this gigantic Auto Industry that I want every ambitious man *who really wants* to make more money, **to have** these 6 Instruction Jobs, just to see how easily and quickly I can boost his pay way up. Just think! **Seven thousand Millions of Dollars** are paid to Auto men every year for *upkeep alone*—**Nineteen Million Dollars a day!** Think what that **means to you**—the Big Pay Opportunities open to you as a Cooke trained auto expert! It's the **one** field for the man who wants a BIG pay check! Learn all about it **now!**

Act Quick!

Don't delay a minute. Send coupon right now while I can still make you this special offer of *6 Auto Instruction Jobs* **absolutely free**—as well as my Big Auto Book, **free too!** Act now!

B. W. COOKE Directing Engineer

Chicago Motor Training Corporation

1916 Sunnyside Ave. Dept. 767 CHICAGO, ILL.

Western Story Magazine

EVERY WEEK

Vol. LXIV Contents for October 9, 1926 No. 2

ONE NOVEL

The Border Bandit's Prize . . *Max Brand* . . . 23

TWO SERIALS

The Masked Marshal of Altamonte . *George Gilbert* . . . 3
A Four-part Story—Part One

The Temple of the Sun . . . . *Arthur Preston Hankins* . 75
A Six-part Story—Part Four

FOUR SHORT STORIES

Horse Before the Car . . . *E. C. Lincoln* . . . 66
The Phantom Piute . . . . *Ray Humphreys* . . . 91
Fifty-seven Flat . . . . . *Frank Richardson Pierce* . 99
A Bad Good Man Was He (Poem) . *William Albert* . . . 120
Gunfleet's Dicker . . . . . *Ernest Haycox* . . . 121

TWO ARTICLES

Men Who Made the West . . *Edna Erle Wilson* . . 110
(Pat Garrett)

Your Dog . . . . . *David Post* . . . 132
(The Samoyed)

MISCELLANEOUS

Interglacial Forest in Alaska . . . 65
State Flowers of the West (The Apple Blossom, Ark.) 74
Glacier Park Ravaged by Fire . . . 90
Sun Dance on Fort Hall Reservation . . 98
Hard Times for Transcontinental Hikers . 109
A Neat Shot 119
Big Timber Offered by Government . . 133

DEPARTMENTS

The Round-up . . . . *The Editor* . . . 134
The Hollow Tree . . . . *Helen Rivers* . . . 137
Where to Go and How to Get There . *John North* . . . 140
Missing 142

Publication issued every week by Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Ormond G. Smith, President; George C. Smith, Vice President and Treasurer; George C. Smith Jr., Vice President; Ormond V. Gould, Secretary. Copyright, 1926, by Street & Smith Corporation, New York. Copyright, 1926, by Street & Smith Corporation, Great Britain. All Rights Reserved. Publishers everywhere are cautioned against using any of the contents of this magazine either wholly or in part. Entered as Second-class Matter, September 4, 1917, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Canadian Subscription, $7.50. Foreign, $8.50.

WARNING—Do not subscribe through agents unknown to you. Complaints are daily made by persons thus victimized.

IMPORTANT—Authors, agents, and publishers are requested to note that this corporation does not hold itself responsible for loss of unsolicited manuscripts while at this office or in transit; and that it cannot undertake to hold uncalled-for manuscripts for a longer period than six months. If the return of manuscript is expected, postage should be inclosed.

YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION, $6.00 SINGLE COPIES, 15 CENTS

NOW FREE

B. W. COOKE's FREE TRIAL

6 AUTO Instruction JOBS

CLIP COUPON

5 BIG OUTFITS Free OF EXTRA COST

EARN up to $150 a Week!

If you're earning a cent less than $60 a week, *clip coupon now.* Get the PROOF that you can be on your way to BIG PAY as an Auto Expert QUICK! *See for yourself* how *fascinating* this training is—how easily you can master Auto Work right in your own home—and how quickly you can get in line for the big Auto Jobs that pay up to $150 a week and more—or a Money-Making Auto Business of your own! Remember these Instruction Jobs come to you ABSOLUTELY FREE and without obligation. Clip coupon now.

I'll train you AT HOME

Get these free Instruction Jobsnow. See how thorough, how complete "JOB-WAY" Training is—includes all Electrical work—Ignition, Starting, Lighting—all Mechanical, also Welding, Brazing, Vulcanizing—also Business Course, Salesmanship, Advertising—How to keep Simple Books—also Students' Magazine, also 5 working Outfits. Nowhere else can you get this original genuine, copyrighted B. W. Cooke "JOB-WAY" Training.

This Big Auto Book Also FREE

Coupon brings this startling, revolutionary Auto Book, too, absolutely Free! Shows how hundreds of men have reached Big Pay in amazingly quick time! Shows what you can do. Send for it now!

SEND ME LESSONS and BOOK FREE

B. W. COOKE, 1916 Sunnyside Ave., Dept. 767, Chicago

Send me absolutely FREE and without any obligation on my part, 6 Auto Instruction Jobs. Also your Auto Book FREE and full particulars of your 5 Outfits Offer.

Name .....

Address .....

Town ..... State .....

TO PROVE that "JOB-WAY" Is "PAY-RAISE" Training

Clip coupon now. I'll send you absolutely FREE OF CHARGE—with positively *no obligation* on your part—6 "JOB-WAY" Instruction JOBS! and my big book. I want you to *SEE for yourself* just why "JOB-WAY" Training is bringing so many men Big Money in such *remarkably quick time.* I want you to see how men *without a day's previous auto experience*—and only *common schooling* become Garage Owners, Superintendents, Managers, and earn up to $150 a week and more! I want you to see why Hundreds of men have found "JOB-WAY" Training to be such interesting, most practical money-making training!

That's why I make you this unusual offer—with absolutely no strings on it and **not a single penny's charge.** Clip coupon now and I'll rush your jobs to you *absolutely Free!*

Coupon Brings Full Details of My 5 OUTFITS OFFER

Includes Tools, Tool Bag, Electrical Test Bench and Radio Receiving Set—all Equipment. Also 303 Wiring Diagram Charts, also Socket Wrench and Ignition Wrench sets.

Be An Auto Expert

The World's Biggest Business Needs You!

There are so many **tremendous Opportunities** in this gigantic Auto Industry that I want every ambitious man *who really wants* to make more money, to have these 6 Instruction Jobs, just to see how easily and quickly I can boost his pay way up. Just think! Seven thousand Millions of Dollars are paid to Auto men every year for *upkeep alone*—Nineteen Million Dollars a day! Think what that means to you—the Big Pay Opportunities open to you as a Cooke trained auto expert! It's the one field for the man who wants a BIG pay check! Learn all about it now!

Act Quick!

Don't delay a minute. Send coupon right now while I can still make you this special offer of *6 Auto Instruction Jobs* absolutely free—as well as my Big Auto Book, free too! Act now!

B. W. COOKE Directing Engineer

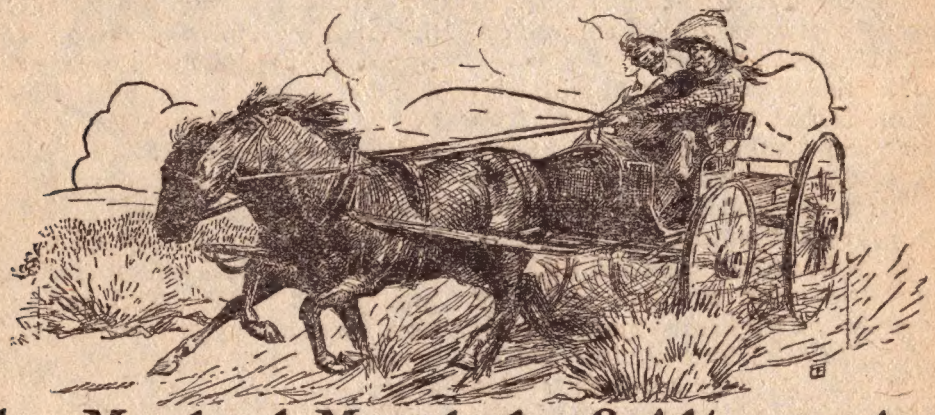
Chicago Motor Training Corporation

1916 Sunnyside Ave. Dept. 767 CHICAGO, ILL.

Western Story Magazine

EVERY WEEK

Vol. LXIV OCTOBER 9, 1926 No. 2



The Masked Marshal of Altamonte

By George Gilbert

Author of "Holsters Tied Down," etc.

CHAPTER I.

EL TIGRE BLANCO.

ATTEND, Pedro!" "El Tigre Blanco" snapped his thumb and forefinger imperatively.

"Si, señor;" and Pedro forgot his siesta-time repose to pay strict attention to what the slender man in the silver-bedecked clothing had to say.

"Many Americanos are coming into town to-day. I have word that there will be a meeting in the house of Juan Hones, brother of that pig, Arturo Hones, who is master of the X Bar H. I would have sure news of what they talk about."

"Si, señor. It is not for nothing that my cousin, Carmencita, is kitchen maid to the wife of Juan Hones."

"For that I called upon you, idle fellow. Begone," said the raider and pointed a lean forefinger in the direction of Altamonte, the town in the fold of the hills below where his ragged group of bandits were resting, after a long run to escape the pursuit of rurales below the line.

Altamonte was in a long, somewhat narrow trough between the rolling foothills. The trough ran almost north and south through the Big Thicket region. The American ranchers there ruled by might of gun and rope, and literally "stood off" the raiders by fear. For some years all had been quiet; latterly,

however, there had been a renewal of rustling and theft, and rumors of gun running, dope running, booze running and the like had been revived. And, with those rumors, went the name, always spoken by the Mexicans with an eye over one shoulder, of the dreaded leader, El Tigre Blanco. Report had it that this leader of the raiders was very light of skin, had very light hair and light eyes, was, in fact, an albino, with all of an albino's wild, mysterious beauty of manner. Added to this was the cunning of the snake and that of the tiger or jaguar. Well did men call him The White Tiger!

The raider chief went to where his *mozo*, Esteban Morales, had placed his thick and comfortable blankets against the foot of a big, warm rock. Then he sat down in the shade. He was served with *tequila* from a fat little bottle kept wrapped in cloths wetted and held in a current of wind and thus cooled by evaporation. He smoked apart from his men. He ruled them by fear and by their belief that his seemingly always correct information was due to miraculous powers of discernment. His personality was vivid; he was known to be without fear himself—to be reckless and cruel. He gave with a lavish hand to those who pleased him; to others he gave wounds of death. In towns he often made Morales appear as chief, that he might the better weave his spells in secret.

The long shadows drew their velvet softness out to longer lengths still; the dry land became yet more still and mysterious. The *bandidos* began to prepare their evening meal, with an especially fine platter for the chief, who deigned to partake of what his *mozo* brought to him. Yet, as he rested, smoked, drank, or ate, always El Tigre Blanco kept an eye out toward Altamonte, whose lights presently began to twinkle there on the flatter land. Always he watched, waited, for the return of his spy and emissary, "Pedro, El Negro," Peter, the black one.

As the dark came on apace, the eyes of the near-albino seemed to take on a fiercer gleam. Men said that he could see as well in the dark as the jaguar can itself. Men whispered of him that once he had slain a freak white tiger in the far south, and that he had eaten its liver and heart, and thus had taken to himself the attributes of the beast for which he was named. Thus the superstitions of the ancient Aztecs, whose animal worship had survived in the crossbreed followers of El Tigre Blanco, endowed him with strange powers; and he took care to foster the idea that he was clothed in power, strength, and mystery, and could slay suddenly, even at a distance. And out of these intertwined superstitions and beliefs grew his mighty power for evil all up and down the inner land—the land of mystery, where the sun flamed, and cattle were few and wary, and horses were of superior strength when they survived at all.

Now El Tigre was north, for reasons best known to himself. And he was intent upon holding by terror the new grip he had gained on a land some time past reclaimed from savagery by white men of the saddle, rope, and six-gun.

CHAPTER II.

THE COUNCIL OF WAR.

IN the long, sunlit afternoon Arthur Hones rode into Altamonte. Fifty miles he had ridden to appear in the conference he had called by a quiet passing of word of mouth to a score of ranches within the district.

Hones was a bit solid now—had been a light rider of note not so many years before. Now his cowboys rode for him, broke his horses, and roped for him. His wide-spreading herds were ample to pay all charges, and Hones was taking life more leisurely. His bachelor

outfit on the upper rolls of the San Felicé foothills had its roomy dobe ranch house where a sweet spring came out into the flats, as well as its half-dozen line-camp shacks in the higher range, where the cattle grazed in a system of cañons and arroyos with fairly low mesas in between. Hones' gray eyes were keen, his shoulders broad; he sat a horse well. Everything about the man denoted restraint and power.

Hones rode to the house of his brother, John Hones, at the upper end of Altamonte's one rambling street. He gazed with silent approval at the horses leaning against the hitch rail, noted with eagerness the brands represented.

"Uncle Jimmie Nolan of Triple K, Pete Barcomb of I O B, Reese Dwyer of Clover Leaf, Andy Maroney of A M Bar——" he ran over the list as he snugged his own bridle ends into a jam knot that the horse could pull against without avail, but that the human hand could release at a mere touch, almost. Then Hones strode stiff-leggedly toward the door of his brother's house, being greeted cordially.

"Hi, old socks!" said Uncle Jimmie Nolan.

"Dawg-gone, come on in an' eat some of your own beef for a change," said his brother John.

"Called the meetin' t' order, an' then was late himse'f," Reese Dwyer chided.

"He sure looks like he was ready t' eat a wolf raw," came from Andy Maroney.

Pete Barcomb merely grunted some short phrase of greeting.

"I like the copiousness of Pete's hail the best," Art Hones informed them, as he snapped off his belted guns and hung them over the back of a chair with the others thus disposed. He threw his hat into a corner and looked about the room. There were a few over twenty men there—men steady and quiet and true, yet men who needed a leader.

There was only one man who stood over the rest, and that was Arthur Hones. It was his will and brain power that had drawn them together. The others were average men, brave, honest, decent. Yet each lacked that stern quality of leadership that makes of certain men captains and doers of great deeds. It had been Hones who had cleared the region of rustlers and horse thieves in other years. It had been Hones who had brought whatever of law the region had needed in other years. Now, with the mining boom to make Altamonte grow beyond its real needs, followed by the deflation of that boom, which left a residue of bad men unemployed, with the appearance of the strange, evil man from the south, matters had been going badly again; and the honest folk had again turned to Hones for leadership.

The meeting he had called was the result of that reliance upon Arthur Hones, owner of the X Bar H, bachelor by choice and cowman born and bred, with a lineage of cow sense reaching back into Texas. It went back further than that—back to the hills of Tennessee and the Carolinas where his earlier forbears had been raisers of domesticated bovine stock long before the Revolutionary War.

As if the coming of Hones was all that they had waited for, the men all drew about the walls, leaving the center of the room open for any one who might wish to stand up and "make a talk."

"I'm askin' Art Hones t' say a few words," Uncle Jimmie Nolan suggested, hitching his chair out so he could tip-tilt it back against the wall and thus elevate his knees as high as his head.

This was seconded. John Hones made another suggestion, adopted with enthusiasm: "My wife's got some home-brewed herb beer that we mustn't let waste; I'll have her haze one of our Aztecs in with some."

He called out lustily for the refresh-

ments; and in a moment the door leading to the rear of the house opened; and a dark Mexican appeared, with huge jug and tin cups, which he passed around, leaving the jug with the host.

Over the rim of his brimming cup, Arthur Hones eyed the Mexican. The fellow showed agitation, then fright. He turned to go out. He stopped at a command, and then Hones asked sharply of his brother John:

"Who is that oiler?"

"Oh, one of our Carmencita's cousins. He came curving in to-day to visit her, an' 'Ma's' put him t' work t' earn his keep."

"Oh, all right, if you know him," said Arthur, dismissing the Mexican with a negligent wave of the hand and holding the now empty cup on his knee. "Let's get down t' cases."

They gave him attention as he stood up and began to talk in quiet, even tones.

"Now, men, the sign reads this a way—we've settled back on our ha'nches and taken it too easy. We cleaned up once and let 'er go that a way. Since that mining excitement brought so many men in here, and then left them flat when she petered out, this town's got rotten again. And then, there's the temptation for gun running, dope running and booze running from across the line. And now we get it that that hombre, El Tigre Blanco, is back again. You've put it up to me, and I've got just one word t' say——"

"Why cain't you take holt an' lead again?" Uncle Jimmie asked.

"It needs a younger man. Since I got piled by that outlaw I was breaking two-three years ago I haven't been as good for long rides as I was once; and it slowed my wrist down, too, getting it twisted that a way. I'm too slow on the draw now to go against real bad men. And every one knows it, too, which would make it easy to have a quick-draw bad man rolled against me."

"Sure, we savvy; it ain't lack of grit an' heart." Andy Maroney spoke for them all, patting his knee to emphasize his statement. "It would be murder for us to ask you t' go against a fast gun now. Who can do it?"

"It's going t' need a two-fisted fighter; an' we've got t' back him up," Arthur Hones went on. "Have any of you men got a man in mind?"

Several were suggested; but at each suggestion, Art Hones shook his head, with such remarks as:

"Good average man, but not enough iron in him;" or "Oh, he might do t' run a few ornery sheepmen out;" or "Too slow on the draw."

"Got a man in mind your ownse'f?" John Hones asked.

Art Hones nodded, and they waited for the name; but he chose to speak on another subject. "Since that economy wave hit the capital, they've cut down the ranger force and have taken away the squad that rode the Big Thicket country. That, of itself, has made the bad element prick up its jas-ack ears. The way I look at it, we need a man whose name alone will carry his brand right along with it. The right kind of a man could come in here and with very li'le shootin' now, iron things out. He'd throw down on a few, and the rest would quit."

"All but that El Tigre Blanco," Pete Barcomb objected. Pete recently had lost a hundred head of stock and was inclined toward pessimism.

"He'll ferret out that hombre's trail and organize a raid for us that will lay him out, cold," Hones went on, unmoved by the interruption.

"I'm askin' again, if you've got a man in mind?" his brother insisted.

"I have," said Arthur; and they all bent forward, intent upon the name.

"Who is he?" Reese Dwyer asked at last.

"Brace Turlock," answered Arthur Hones in a low tone.

"Turlock!"

"That two-gun killer?"

"Could we get him?"

"Would he stay hitched?"

These exclamations went around the circle in flashes of talk as each man, looking into his neighbor's eye, tested the sentiment of the gathering.

Art Hones summed up his belief in the man he had named. "Turlock is riding shotgun now for the Browder Mines, over toward Douglass. I know where to find him. I know him like a book. You all will remember that I made a hand of him. His father was my bunkie in trail days. He was my top hand before he left of his own accord. He's been town marshal in half a dozen tough places, express guard, shotgun man for gold shipments from the mines, rustler-getter and hoss-thief fader."

"Will he come?" Uncle Jimmie asked.

"He'll do anything I say," tersely replied Arthur.

"I move that we make it unanimous, then," John Hones suggested.

A rolling chorus of "Ayes" sealed the pact, and Pete Barcomb moved that they add to the motion power for Art Hones to write at once for the needed gunman to come and clean up the region.

"What'll we do with the powers that be in Altamonte?" Dwyer asked. "They're not regularly elected office holders, as we've never organized in a formal, complete way out here. But, such as they are, what'll we do with them?"

"We'll send them word that they better pin their tin stars onto their front doors and quit. We'll call a town meeting, declare an emergency, turn Turlock loose, and inform the world, cold, that he's in charge. That's all," Art Hones summed up their desires for them.

They nodded, passed their word to chip in to a common defense fund if necessary, and then began to think of something to eat, as John Hones could tell by their glances toward the kitchen door. In fact, a promise had been held out that all who attended the meeting should be treated to one of Ma Hones' best chicken dinners.

"I saw that door latch move," Art Hones said, with sudden force, reaching over toward the chair whereon hung the guns. As he drew one at random from the nearest holster, the latch, indeed, did move; and the very dark Mexican lad came in, his face now tense and a pasty bluish-white, as his tardy tongue uttered:

"Hora de comer, señores!"

"Puttin' on lugs, tellin' us so polite that dinner's ready?" Art Hones held the dark boy's faltering eye; then he let the gun slip back into the holster.

"Oh, Pedro's all right; he's gone on Carmencita, that's all," John Hones said carelessly. "Le's see what the old lady's made out of all those immature hens and aiggs and tin cow and such that she bought this morning."

They filed out into the long, low-ceiled room beyond and soon were enjoying the hospitality of the old-fashioned sort.

"When you coming into the fold and get married?" Ma Hones demanded of Art, as she piled his plate with biscuits creamed with tasty gravy and another helping of game chicken.

"Stop pestering me, Ma; you know that when you said 'yes' t' my brother Johnnie that my marrying days were ended before they began." Art laughed off her home thrust.

"Shucks, you done told me that too many times. Who'll get all them cattle and lands and so on," she asked, "after you've laid down t' rest?"

"Oh, I'll leave it to you an' Johnnie or——"

"We got more than we need now, since Johnnie done sold his place to Peter Barcomb and invested his money. We live in town in style and don't haze no cow animiles around in those big

open spaces, thank Heaven." She raised her hands in a mock solemnity that made them all laugh.

"Well, on the level and square," Art said sobering down, "when I go, it'll all go to my dead brother's gal, Sally. I saw her when I was back in Kansas last year—nice girl, sensible, loving, and kind. I tried t' get her to come out here, and she promised she would. I wouldn't be surprised t' have her come any time now. She's all the new sprout there is on the Hones tree, being Sally's only child. As for Johnnie and Ma, here, they never raised a yearlin'; and I never even got as far as marryin, as you all know."

The talk now passed back to the purpose of their recent meeting and the need for sending for Brace Turlock. The meal ended in a chorus of admonitions for Art Hones to write his letter of invitation to Turlock at once. There could be no delay.

"Mail will go out in the morning, on the stage," he told them. "I'll write that letter this evening about five o'clock and carry it downtown with me an' leave it at the post office. I'm going t' stay with Johnnie and Ma a spell and see if I cain't lay on a layer of fat from her good cooking. I do get tired of what Sing Wah puts onto my plate sometimes."

"Well, get married then, and get a cook of your own," Ma advised the incorrigible old bachelor.

During all this talk Pedro had been shuffling about, under the watchful eye of Mrs. Hones, serving the guests. Now he was gone as they shoved back from the board, and began to smoke, and to talk on other matters.

Out behind the Hones' house Pedro stood, listening. Then he clapped his hands thrice softly. A lad appeared from somewhere among the outbuildings. To him Pedro spoke:

"Alejandro, attend. El Capitan Blanco is at the old place. Go to him and say thus——" and he began to whisper.

Two minutes later the lad, on Pedro's own horse, was on his way toward the southern hills. At first he rode slowly, while close to town. Once outside he began to rake the horse and ride, deep and firmly, getting all out of the horse that it was possible for any one to get out of him. And the animal gave of its best.

As for Pedro, he went indoors again and attended to the wants of these guests of Señora Hones, always with an eye out for the man of the harsh eye —Don Arturo Hones. Now, this man Don Arturo, look you, was feared but respected. A just man, it might be, but a just man who kept track of his stock and who promptly missed a few heads or a score head and who had a very bad way of riding after them until he got them back! And so, a man to be watched and spied upon, and a man for El Tigre Blanco to attend to! So Pedro, the black one, was attentive and polite and supple of back. His white teeth flashed in smiles as the cowmen rallied him on being in love with pretty Carmencita.

The meeting broke up; and then Arthur Hones got a pad and pencil and wrote, his knee for a desk, the note to Brace Turlock, asking him to come to Altamonte and become the arm of the new law that was to be laid down from the saddle—a law that would not be turned aside, nor bribed, nor made slack from fear. There never had been an official organization of the region as yet, and such authority as was exerted in Altamonte was entirely informal. But it had been acquiesced in up till then because it had secured some results. When Arthur Hones had been the power behind that law it had cut clean to the bone and been very efficient. Now he was convinced it had gone slack and futile again and needed toning up.

CHAPTER III.

"HE MUST DIE!"

THE lad Alejandro quailed before the flaming gaze of the too-fair-skinned leader of the ragged crew. The lad had repeated the message sent by him from Pedro El Negro; repeated it exactly and with dispatch, as all those who had messages for that dread captain of death were wont to repeat messages to him.

El Tigre Blanco flung the lad a bit of silver and spoke sharply: "Begone!"

Alejandro retired, thinking himself lucky to escape having an ear cropped off or his back laced with quirt blows.

El Tigre Blanco remained for some time with his head bowed in thought. The flames leaped redly from the heart of the fire at which the evening meal had been cooked. The band had moved back behind a ridge, so that the light of the fire was hidden from those in the valley. A sentinel, left at the ridge, had challenged Alejandro and brought him into the presence of the leader of the robbers.

Presently the chieftain snapped his finger thrice; and a slim, smooth-cheeked young fellow left the group about the fire and came to stand respectfully before El Tigre Blanco, who spoke at once. "Eustacio, the mail coach from Altamonte to Salado leaves at seven?"

"Si, señor."

"You will hold it up halfway between and bring me the mail, all of the mail." This was said meaningly.

"Si, señor; is there a question of a big shipment of gold or jewelry or——"

"There is a question of obedience from you, Eustacio. *Pronto!"*

Eustacio Benides drew back sharply and at once called to him several men, whom he made to mount and ride with him. In five minutes they had gone.

El Tigre Blanco, apart, stern and unyielding, waited, sipping his *tequila* in moderation, as befitted a man who had much on his keen mind. The fire burned low; the men remaining, one by one, went to sleep in swatches of gaudy blankets. Still El Tigre Blanco waited, alert, like a coiled serpent that was ready to strike.

As the night turned and the stars all a-sparkle seemed to dim, he stirred, flipped the butt of his cigarillo into the heart of the fire, stood up, and stretched. Soon came the muffled tramp of horses; and then the lieutenant and his picked men came into camp, swinging down silently. Benides came before El Tigre Blanco and saluted, handing to him the slim mail bag taken from the Altamonte-Salado coach.

"Was there a fight?" El Tigre Blanco demanded.

Benides shook his head and laughed. "But no, my captain; they no longer show fight when we make a demand; it is that they think it is useless."

"Many thanks, Eustacio," said the leader, drawing his knife and slitting the bag deftly. "Let us look over this lot of pigs' letters together."

The other men, at a sign, went to their blankets. El Tigre Blanco sorted the letters over as he and his lieutenant squatted beside the fire. One by one he flipped the letters into the flames, after looking at each to see if there was money inclosed. The toll of money was small; and Eustacio was beginning to hint that El Tigre Blanco had made far too much trouble over that mail, when the leader gave an exclamation of pleasure as he read over a letter. Eustacio was unable to read, so had to depend upon his chief's ability in that direction.

"You have, then, found something of value?" Eustacio leaned over eagerly.

"Yes, but not gold. Information of value—more value than gold or silver,

or even than diamonds," El Tigre Blanco told him.

"Ah——" said Eustacio showing disappointment.

"Ah——" said the captain, mimicking his underling, "always men like you grasp for the money in sight and so remain slaves. Me? I plan for you all and know what to do. We must take a risk now, Eustacio, and forego the taking of money till we have met and conquered a dire threat of peril."

"Can I not offer my services?" said Eustacio ingratiatingly.

"Yes—by remaining quietly here. Keep the men together. If I am not here by sundown, remain no longer, but flee into Old Mexico. Offer your services and that of the band to some other leader. Do not try to lead yourself, for you lack brains to lead. I tell you so plainly."

"But your cache—you may wish to send your gold to some loved one you will leave behind." This was said cunningly.

"My cache," said the white one, snapping erect and slapping his belt, "it is here! We are down to next to nothing. We have been fleeing and dodging for months since the accursed rurales below began to be active. I have made few good hauls since coming up here; although all is ready now, if only we can get rid of one man who seems about to organize the lesser weights against us. Eustacio, keep in mind what I have told you. Watch, wait, till sundown. Then, you are your own man again. I shall either be here at sundown or dead."

"Then the enterprise is one of peril?"

"Much peril. Saddle my horse. Keep the men quiet and together. Threaten them with my displeasure. Let no one know what I have told you. If I am not here at sundown, I repeat—depart with all speed."

"And this one man whom you go to meet?"

"Is a brave man, a quick man! But I hope to be quicker than he is—to be braver would be impossible. Go; put my horse in shape for the trail. The man of whom I have spoken must die. Awaken Morales and send him to me."

Eustacio left the presence of this serpent-man with fear. He had seen him disappear thus alone at other times and always afterward had been heard the report of a killing involving peril. Like the others of the band, Eustacio held this killer in awe that was something akin to bestial reverence—such as apes might feel for their keeper who fed and warmed them. Morales, awakened, came to hear certain whispered orders from the raider chief, who often pointed secretly toward Benides. So, when the bandits awakened with the sun and went about yawning, they saw that their chief was absent. Those who ventured to ask their lieutenant a question as to his whereabouts were met with threats and blows and were made to understand that it was not for them to meddle in affairs far above their understanding.

The letter El Tigre Blanco had taken from the mail bag he had burned, after reading it; and last of all he had burned the mail bag, giving Eustacio directions to see that the metal parts of the bag were raked out of the cold ashes in the morning and hidden where they would not be found. The letter had read as follows:

BRACE TURLOCK, care of Browder Mines,
Bermijillo.

DEAR BRACE: There's a job up here you'd like. We want a man that'll take hold here and clean up for this whole region. The town's gone bad. As you know, there's never been a formal election; but they've jogged along by common consent, letting old Barney Jaynes be a sort of cross between an alcalde and sheriff. Barney's slipping all the time, not dishonest, but slack; and the tin-horn element is in cahoots with a bad hombre they

call El Tigre Blanco, who has the small-fry oilers all buffaloed. The Castilian Mexicans are all against him, but none of them dare make a squawk much; and I don't blame them none, because he's got a bad reputation and sure needs some one to ride shot gun onto him. Come up and see us through, and we'll ride right with you till the cows come home. Your dad's old bunkie,

ARTHUR HONES.

As for El Tigre, the chieftain of fear, he rode quietly and easily. Before dawn he found on the borders of Altamonte a concealed stable, where he left his horse, after threatening the keeper of the place with that warning that comes from the tense forefinger drawn across the throat, at the same time touching lightly with his right hand the dark haft of the knife in his belt. The haft was of sinister-hued obsidian that told of Aztec manufacture in a long past generation. Then El Tigre Blanco walked silently into the sleeping town and disappeared among the mazes of its small but tangled Chihuahua. There he remained, concealed by one Felipé Granada, cantina keeper, a man made friendly by terror. Like a coiled serpent ready to strike, the outlaw waited while the morning hours passed; siesta time came and went. Then, as the afternoon shadows promised coolness, he emerged and prepared to steal forth upon his mission of hate and death.

CHAPTER IV.

"WHO DID THIS?"

THROUGH the sun-smitten hours, Altamonte drowsed. The shadows became more dense, crept, lengthened. Down the street a hairless dog stretched, yawned, and rolled over to bake the other side. A pony, at a vega pole, slumped one hip up and the other down. A door slammed; a woman somewhere raised a querulous voice. A Mexican child whimpered and was hushed; and, then some one walked on the street, and siesta time had passed in Altamonte.

The door of the John Hones house opened. Arthur Hones stepped out, glanced up and down the street from the habit of long years of caution, then turned to face the interior to bid his brother good-by before going downtown for a stroll.

There was a spurt of flame from somewhere. Arthur Hones pitched into the front door of his brother's home—a bullet through his back. John Hones leaped over the dead body, reached for the gun that was not at his hip, and looked all about.

There was not a sign of any one. Two or three men then appeared away off below, where the business places were, looking eagerly to see what had caused the alarm. John called lustily. Feet resounded in hurried progress.

Ma Hones came from the kitchen on the run. "Who did this?" she demanded of her husband.

"I wish I knew. He started out, turned to speak to me. Then came a shot; and he pitched into my arms, almost daid then," John Hones said bitterly.

"And him, the finest man of all," she said, kneeling beside him. "If you'd only sent for Turlock before, this might not have happened."

A scared dark face appeared in the doorway leading to the kitchen. It was that of Pedro, his teeth chattering. "Heui!" he wailed. "Alas, señor, I shall pray for his soul." He had his own ideas as to who had killed Don Arturo. He wished to be away from there but did not dare flee then for fear of attracting attention to himself.

And now men came, and came to mourn and to plan for a hunt to discover the criminal. And, while the one man whose brain might have pieced together the mystery was gripped in the stillness of death itself, from the se-

cluded stable there stole a lithe, serpent-man, who mounted his shadowy horse, threw a bit of gold to the shivering menial that had waited on him, and again warned the stable keeper.

"If it is known that I was in town to-day, you shall die on top of a hill of the fire ants in the desert, with the sun flaming down onto you unscreened, and with no water to touch your protruding tongue. Be silent!"

He was gone. The sun yet rode well above the horizon. The slayer had glided between buildings, kept to the rear of the structures, and had timed his death stroke so well that not a soul had seen him leave the stable and steal to the narrow slit between the two old shacks across the way from the Hones house at the far end of town. Nor had they seen him slip back again after the shot. He had used smokeless powder, masking the gun between a pile of tottering boxes and barrels laid up at haphazard in the narrow slit between the two leaning, abandoned, old shacks. At the stable he had but to ride into the thickety growth behind it to disappear from sight and thus be able to get away into bypaths well trodden by cattle and horses being driven from the town to near-by grazing spots.

El Tigre Blanco indeed had slain Arthur Hones, but not face to face, as brave men fight. His was the coward's shot, the acceptance of the turned back as the way to remove a foeman who was more than worthy of his steel, if met fairly and squarely!

CHAPTER V.

"WHERE IS TURLOCK?"

THE death of Arthur Hones came as a thunderstroke to the good men of Altamonte. The meeting in John Hones' house had been kept secret, and the other men who had been there had already ridden away. Aside from John Hones, the others all lived out of town. John Hones now sent riders to call them back, and he set about it to comb the town for information. And, yet, John Hones, easy-going, loyal, fine-spirited, was not Don Arturo. He did not carry fear and respect with him. Men liked him in that vague way that neutral men inspire liking. Yet they did not let their eyes drop from before his gaze, and they did not give ground before him when he angered. Had it been John who had died thus and had it been Arthur Hones who had made the search, all might have gone differently.

The body, soon in its rude coffin in the Hones house, awaited burial on the morrow. Every corner of the town's ragged Chihuahua was combed out; men were questioned and women pressed for strict answers. There was much shrugging of thin and fat shoulders, many "Quién sabe's," and the like—but of information not a trace. So the late afternoon hours passed; the night fell like a pall.

Pedro, horrified at the death, had become hysterical and was ordered by Ma Hones to go home and stay away till he could quit moaning. Whereupon he disappeared and, on the way back toward the hills, found heart enough from grief's pain to sing snatches of old ballads, the easiest on his tongue being stanzas from "The Outlaw."

The questions that John Hones had asked all through town were:

"Have there been any strangers in and out of town to-day?"

"Did any one hear threats made against Arthur Hones?"

He could get no illuminating answers to those queries. All the old grudges caused by Arthur Hones' former campaign to clean up the town and region were thought to have vanished with the years. All through the Chihuahua section a pall of silence had fallen. Mexicans walked about with "eyes

over their shoulders." Their usually facile tongues cleaved to the roofs of dry mouths. The bad white element was equally secretive and doubly wary.

So the night came; and the night passed, and dawn returned to find riders coming into town from all directions. They gathered for the funeral, the men of X Bar H in charge of all arrangements. The small cemetery adjacent to the town was visited in the afternoon, and the body of the loved range chief was laid to rest there. The mourners dispersed with bent heads and creased brows and mutterings of vengeance. The men who had been at the meeting in the Hones house had talked during the day and had let out the secret of the letter sent to Turlock and the reason why it had been so sent. Every one agreed that when Brace Turlock came, the mystery of Hones' death would be solved. His prestige already was established by his work as guard and legal gunman.

And so, while the fallen range king slept, the men of lesser brain but as much grit and sheer nerve, waited. He would have acted; but they, average and loyal, needing a leader of leaders, waited for Turlock. Men asked each other:

"Where is Turlock?"

"How long will it take for Turlock to come?"

"What will he do when he arrives?"

News of the death and of her legacy was sent by John Hones at once to Sally Hones, in Omatway, Kansas. The stage, returning to Altamonte, brought word of the stealing of the mail bag by the raiders. So it was known that perhaps the letter to Turlock was lost.

And now days passed, quietly, leaden footed. The craft of El Tigre Blanco was shown in this; he did not make any display of elation or show in any way that he had made a master stroke. He held his followers down—even chased across the line a band of other robbers for fear the men of the Altamonte region might organize. He wanted them to quiet down, to let their indignation evaporate by degrees. The bad element in the town must have had some inkling of his desires, for never was the town so orderly as then. Uncle Jimmie Nolan promised to write to Turlock; but he procrastinated, for everything seemed quiet. The killing of Hones was partly accepted as a mystery, partly laid to some chance bullet fired by some one in the outskirts at target practice and afterward afraid to avow responsibility for an accidental killing. Uncle Jimmie went to Texas on a visit, saying he would write to Turlock on the train, when he had lots of time.

And yet, there were men of better fiber who remembered that it had been planned to send for the gunman earlier, and who thought Turlock had been sent for, and who continued to ask: "Where is Turlock?" And, after this query had gone unanswered for a time, men, perhaps prompted by the bad element and forgetting that the mail bag had been stolen, began to ask: "Has Turlock turned yellow? He was sent for by his best friend who is now dead. Why doesn't he turn up to ferret out the killer?"

And so the days passed.

"Ace" Watson, foreman of the X Bar H, and John Hones had word that Sally Hones had started from her Kansas home to take possession of the big ranch, about whose operation she knew next to nothing.

And still the question was asked: "Is Turlock yellow?" For it was accepted that Uncle Jimmie had by now written him and that Turlock had decided not to come.

And all this time Brace Turlock, riding shotgun for the ore shipments of the Browder Mines Company—ore so heavy and glinty with gold that its rich-

ness was proverbial—sat out his trick atop the big wagons, his shotgun across his lap, his guns belted on and always ready for action. And as he so rode, his chill-gray eyes took note of all that came within range of their almost telescopic vision; and bad men slunk away from the trail and feared to hold up the ore shipments. For Turlock, with brain power and nerve that daunted them all, was known to be ready, able, and willing to kill at the wink of an eyelash in protection of the interests of those who hired him to act as guardian of their golden treasure.

No word of the killing at Altamonte came to Turlock in that distant region. If it had come, unaccompanied by a letter from some friend, he would have regretted the death of his friend but would not have gone back, perhaps, not knowing how such action could be of benefit to any one. The letter that would have called him back at once had been stolen and burned by El Tigre Blanco, who now had time for fresh plans to enrich himself at the expense of the disorganized people of the Altamonte region.

And, wishing to make it impossible for the last wishes of Don Arturo Hones to be fulfilled, El Tigre Blanco sent a note by Esteban Morales, his doglike mozo, down into the mining region where the Browder interests operated their rich claims. This note, couched in vague terms, understandable when backed up by key phrases from Esteban, made plain El Tigre Blanco's wishes to a compatriot in that region with regard to one Brace Turlock. That done, El Tigre Blanco felt secure in his plans for the future, when men would forget and grow careless and lazy minded with regard to crime.

As for Eustacio Benides, thinking that the confidence he shared with his chief over the robbery of the mail bag gave him a right to privileges above the rest of the band, he presumed not a little upon this new footing on which he found himself and made more and more veiled references to a desire to know where his "beloved chieftain" kept his secret cache.

"You do not wish to know for yourself but so you could divide with the men of the band if I were slain in some foray?" El Tigre Blanco hinted to him at the close of a certain day.

"That is it, El Capitan."

"The desire does your heart credit; Esteban Morales will return from a certain mission to-day; at evening I will show you the place."

Eustacio smiled to himself and was happy. He secretly made all ready for a quick departure that night. Esteban, back from delivering the message of death with regard to Bruce Turlock, reported to El Tigre Blanco, who secretly pointed to Benides and whispered meaningly. Morales nodded.

In the dusk, El Tigre Blanco, having noted that Morales had disappeared, signed to Eustacio and went aside from the camp. Eustacio followed him at a discreet distance. The leader wound his way down the slope, along the level, and up a little cut. The washed-out slot in the earth turned and twisted upon itself. It was quite dusky in there.

"There, in that bank, under that white stone, is my cache, Eustacio. Lift the stone aside, and you will find the bag."

Now for the first time the lieutenant relaxed vigilance and glanced aside.

Now the dread captain of death spoke sharply: "Beware!"

A gun cracked; Eustacio crumpled, was still. A command from El Tigre Blanco and Esteban Morales appeared from behind a boulder farther up the slot in the earth, his rifle smoking still from the fatal shot.

El Tigre spoke quietly, intensely: "He wished to know the secret of my cache; I told him it was under the

white boulder. Dig a grave close to it and roll the boulder on top of him. Esteban. You are now, more than ever, my real lieutenant and familiar spirit. Always obey me and your parents in Old Mexico will live and be happy. Fail me and——" he made a gesture of terror.

"You will always find me obedient, señor."

"That is well, for you, Esteban, and for your parents. Eustacio had ideas of his own, bad ideas, ideas against my policy. And he knew why I went from the camp one night and what happened in Altamonte afterward. I had no hold on him that was secure. I reflected that he had but to mount a good horse and leave us; and he would be free to sell information about us and to win rich rewards for it, whereas you and others that I trust are tied to me in some way. I trust you, Esteban, fully," said the white one with a queer rasping chuckle. "Bury, then, this light-minded one under the white stone where he thought my cache was. Then return to the camp and take command while I sleep."

CHAPTER VI.

"WHO ROLLED YOU AGAINST ME?"

AFTER his daily trip to Big Smelter, Brace Turlock swung down from off the seat of the ore wagon. Pete Niles, the jerk-line expert, came after him. They had stopped at Bermijillo before driving up to the Browder Mines, where the wagons would be loaded with the morrow's rich shipment. The ore was exceedingly rich and so was guarded closely. The little town was looked upon by Turlock as home at that time, and there he kept his riding outfit.

Turlock carried his shotgun with him into The Three Spot and held it in the crook of his arm while he drank mildly, sweeping each person in the long, narrow room with his level, gray eyes. Turlock was not tall but gave the impression of strength. His tread was like that of a cat, and his arms were a bit long. He stood now with his back against the wall, where bar and wall met. Thus he was in a corner, where his eyes were able to command everything, and his back was protected. Men glanced at him when he was looking the other way—glanced and then let their eyes fall quickly. There was no suggestion of foppery about the man. He had nothing on him that would glint in the sunshine. His clothing was dull of hue, his belt devoid of ornament, his guns simple sixes, and his knife just a clasp, with a snap catch to hold the blade open in its sheath. He was quiet, low of voice.

"Nice trip?" the bartender asked of Niles.

"Not a thing happened," said the other with a dry chuckle in his corded, bronzed throat.

"Guess they've found it ain't healthy to monkey with that ore a whole lot?"

"Not since Brace began sitting in on the game," admiringly answered the driver.

Turlock sent his glass whirling down the damp bar, wiped his mouth with a corner of his dusty-gray neckcloth, and started toward the door. Men watched him furtively—some with open, frank admiration.

The swinging door opened as Brace neared it, and a man came in noisily. He was wide of shoulder, and his spurs jingled. Several men in the place stiffened in their chairs. The man saw Turlock, turned about, and watched him as he went out, sneered at the gunman's back, and then started toward the bar.

Pete Niles spoke to him sharply: "You better step easy; that's Brace Turlock you've been alludin' at, stranger."

"Oh, him." The stranger tossed

down his drink and smacked his lips with evident enjoyment of the fiery stuff. "All right, what then?"

"He might iron a few of those wrinkles off'n your map."

Niles lost no opportunities to enlarge upon the prowess of his shotgun guard and was determined that this man, seemingly a stranger, should not go unwarned of the consequences of opposing the gunman. This boasting of Niles over Turlock's fame had drawn Brace into several affairs calling for cool nerve and quick judgment, for the bad men of the region at first had taken the advent of the new shotgun guard as a sort of challenge to their ability with guns. Latterly they had decided to keep away from him and the golden loads he guarded, and Turlock had a little rest from defending his own life and his employers' gold-specked ore. Now it seemed that another bad man had arrived and was looking for trouble; and Niles was not averse to warning him, in advance, that he could find it, if he looked for it far enough and hard enough.

"And then I might iron a few off'n his map," the stranger retorted, hooking his spurs over the lower foot rail and facing the long, narrow room, elbow on the bar.

"It's been tried and found wanting," Niles continued to boast.

But the other came right back with: "Yes, it's been tried; but not by yourn truly yet. I may and I may not try. There's no hurry that I can see."

"No, not any, and most likely won't be," Niles jeered.

The man went out.

Niles turned to the man behind the bar and asked: "Who is that flat-faced hombre?"

"New face here; let some one else tell it." And the man behind the bar took up again his task of polishing glasses.

Niles glanced about the room, but no one volunteered any information. The men who had shown keenest interest at the entrance of the newcomer all looked away; and Niles knew them for hangers-on and tinhorns who might know and approve of the acts of any shady character, so he decided to warn Brace to be on his guard.

As Niles emerged into the street, a man almost bumped into the old-time jerk-line expert, panting out this phrase: "There's a hard-lookin' geezer up the street says he's hunting for Brace. Big, sour-faced, loud talker!"

"Brace left here ahead of him. I'll go look for him."

The mules perked inquiring ears at Niles as he passed the long team and wagon. He looked anxiously for Brace up and down the street. He ran into several small eating bars and the one store, making his eager inquiries. Up the street the bad man could be heard, punctuating his threats with occasional shots into the air. Passing back toward The Three Spot, wondering where Brace could be, Niles stood beside the wagon, looking about anxiously. The bad man was coming closer, and now he was still. Aside from Niles, the people had gone off the street. Niles stood beside the wagon, scratching his frowsled head, his flappy-rimmed hat askew.

"I want this here Turlock!" the bad man yelled. "Turn him loose onto the street, so my wolf can get at him! Yow! Ye-e-e-eeep!"

"I wish you'd stand just a bit farther aside——"

Niles heard Turlock's voice. Turlock was in the empty wagon. "All right, pard," said Niles, edging along. "Been there all the time?"

"Sure have! I saw he was after murder, and I hoped I'd get out of a fight this a way; but he sure seems bent on destruction."

"Woweeee! I want Turlock," the bad man shouted again, very close to

the wagon now. Then he spied Niles and jerked his gun out. "They tell me you're Turlock's ridin' pard; I've a notion to plug you, just for keeps." He balanced on the balls of his feet threateningly.

There came a flash, a report. The bad man spun around, dropped his gun, staggered. Turlock leaped over the tail board of the empty wagon, put his foot on the fallen gun and his hand on the cringing fellow's shoulder. "I didn't aim t' kill you, you bald-faced egg," Brace drawled; "but I guess you won't do any damage yet a while. Now get out of town."

The man winced under the rough grasp, but his eye was steady as he recovered control of himself and gave Brace look for look.

"You hid up and got me, cold turkey," he sneered.

"I gave you more chance than you were goin' t' give my pard Niles here, who has no gun and who you were getting up rage enough to kill," returned Turlock coolly.

"Gimme my gun and an even break——"

"You'll break out of town, hombre, or go out feet first, full of holes," said Turlock, starting him up the street, and the bad man marched along, if not willingly, at least without protest. Brace suddenly asked him: "What's your name?"

"It wouldn't mean anything here; might down below the line," jeeringly replied the fellow.

"I guess you'll stand looking over a whole lot," Brace halted him.

The crowd that had followed wondered as Brace, twirling the man around, held his gun against his body, pressed in deep, and began to feel him over. The man had had but the one gun, and Brace had left that in the dust of the road where he had shot the stranger. Brace found no extra cartridges, beyond a few in one pocket of the fellow's trousers. He got hold of a little memo book, in which were a few notations and names, such as a man will jot down as reminders. Out of this there fell a slip of folded paper. Bruce looked at it. It read:

Brace Turlock
$500 muerto.

Under these words was a rough but effective sketch of the head of a jaguar.

Brace stared at it and then laughed understandingly: "The sign of El Tigre Blanco, eh? But what does my name, with a price under it, mean? Who rolled you against me?"

The bad man was silent, lips compressed.

"I don't know what it means, but El Tigre Blanco never did any one any good. All right, hombre, vamoose. I suppose your hoss is staked out somewhere? Go fork him and vanish. Your shoulder will bother you some, but you're tough an' will survive. March!"

"You mean you're turning me loose, entire?" The bad man stared unbelievingly.

"There ain't no calaboose here and I ain't got time to take you where there is one. Get goin' fast!"

The bad man's face lost its tense expression; and he stepped back slightly, offering his hand. "You're doing what I'd never do, with the tables changed. I'm ridin' now. I've lost five hundred dollars; but you're giving me a chance t' live again, and so——"

His lips framed a whisper. "Look out for El Tigre Blanco! That pays for lettin' me off—pays more than you can tell now. I came here from the upper country, desperate and down to my heel taps. That five hundred dollars looked big to me, then. It doesn't now, and it's not because I'm afraid. A man can die only once; and I'd

rather die looking through clean smoke than in bed, with a doctor pouring dope into me."

"Your name?"

"'Bronc' Savier. Will you shake?" He extended his left hand. His right arm was hanging more and more limp as the wound in his shoulder stained his shirt. Brace took the outstretched paw quickly, and their hands fell apart.

"The ridin' is good now; it'll not be so good soon," Brace said dryly, turned, and walked back toward the group of watchers.

The bad man squared his shoulders as best he could and walked out of town, vanished into the pear thicket, and was gone.

Brace walked back toward The Three Spot, where he was handed a bunch of newspapers. He sat down at a table and opened them. They were copies of the Altamonte *Herald* that he had not had time to read on his last trip into town. Now he scanned the news and even the advertisements.

Then he stared at the headlines telling of the killing of his old friend Arthur Hones and read the article through carefully. The article mentioned that a letter had been sent to Turlock by Hones, mentioned that there were reports that a mysterious gang were holding forth in the hills about Altamonte. The clipping also reported that Miss Sally Hones was expected from the East soon to become mistress of the big ranch. The article told that the stage had been held up and the mail bag taken, and hinted at a mysterious meeting of range men just before Arthur Hones had been killed. Brace called Pete Niles to him and went over the news, item by item with the veteran of the Outlands. Pete began to offer hints.

Brace read on and on, then he took out of his pocket the bit of paper on which was written the terse offer of five hundred dollars for his death. He puzzled it all over. His death had been planned a score of times by evil forces, and he was not unaccustomed to piecing out such plots. Ability to do so had saved his life on more than one occasion.

Finally Brace summed it up to Niles. "Don Arturo killed, after a meeting of range men! The mail robbed after he'd sent me a letter, just before he was killed! Then I'm worth five hundred dollars dead to some one—to El Tigre Blanco! Did Blanco hire Savier direct or was it done through some Chihuahua backwater? What would Don Arturo want of me? He was hurt, had his wrist twisted; it slowed down his draw. He wanted me up there, and some one didn't want me—is that it?"

Pete left him to puzzle it out, and Brace sat for a long time, in a deep brown study. Then Brace stirred and became alert. Niles, at the bar, was boasting loudly of his friend's ability and fame. Brace got up suddenly, threw the newspapers on the table, and pocketed the slip of paper he had taken from El Tigre. He went to Niles and seized his hand.

"Well, so long, old-timer! Tell them to get a new gun guard. I got my pay yesterday; they can have this day's work free. I'm ridin'. Now, listen——" and he whispered to Niles, who slapped his back and nodded comprehension.

Brace went out to the town livery where he hired a horse to take up on the first stage of his trip toward Altamonte; and then he began to make trail smoke as he urged the willing horse down farther toward the line.

"Well, of all the sons of sea cooks!" Niles commented, as he watched the dust cloud grow smaller. "He's sure sudden, either on the shoot or on the decide. Le's go get some of the thirst out of our b'ilers, men. What say?"

The next day Pete, with a new gun

guard, went on to the mines. Three days later, on his next up trip, with a long face and tear-misted eyes, he met the men of Bermijillo. He lined them up for refreshments and imparted to them the news that had saddened him: "Brace got into a jam a day after he left here; a man he'd shot at trying t' hold us up in the desert jumped him in a dry camp and got him. Here's the news in the Douglass *Herald*."

They read it, passed the item from hand to hand.

"Well, no matter how good a man is with a gun, he meets a better; or even if he's still good, some one will creep up on his camp some night and plug him," Pete mourned. His countenance was sorrowful. He refused to be comforted; and the new gun guard did not try to rouse him from his depression, for he knew it would be of no use.

CHAPTER VII.

"WHO IS THAT MAN?"

SATURNINE and methodical, Ace Watson watched for the coming of the Salado-Altamonte stage; for he had received a note of warning from the new mistress of the X Bar H that she was on the way from Kansas. Ace had arrived earlier, left his horse tied to a hitch rail up the street, ordered the supplies he thought would be needed, engaged a freighter to come out with them later, visited every place of refreshment in town, chatted with all his acquaintances, and then had taken his stand on the street across from the Horned Toad, where the stage would stop when it came. Ace had no troubles on his mind. He leaned against a post that held up a sagging sign, smoked, and was content.

Past Ace went a slender fellow, with eyes that were held closed almost to slits. He turned these queer orbs on Ace in passing; and Ace felt something pringle along his spine, as when he saw, coiled under a maguey, a banded, mottled shape of fear. Almost, it seemed to Ace, he could catch the cucumber odor of the diamond-back rattler; and he wondered what had made him think of such a thing there, in mid-street, where there were none of the reptiles. The fellow passed out of sight up the street, going toward the Mexican quarter. Then some one announced that the stage was coming, and Ace turned his eyes to watch the arrival of the swaying vehicle.

The driver swung down, as if he had important business, and opened the door. There came out a young woman, dainty in build, clad in white. Her straw hat and her gloves were white, and somehow she had kept them white during her long trip.

Ace started forward, hat off, face beaming, the wrinkles from sun and wind showing like cracks in a dobe patch in time of drought. She turned at his greeting, and her hand went out as he announced himself:

"From the X Bar H, ma'am."

"Oh, yes," her voice was pleasant and low; "my ranch?"

"Sure is, ma'am, and speaking for it all, mighty glad of it."

"How far is it to the ranch?"

"Oh, just a saunter, about fifty miles or so."

"So far?" By now she had secured control of her hand again. Ace had forgotten to let go of it until she had gently pulled it away from him. "How do we get there?"

"I've got a buckboard in town and a pair of ponies. We'll drive halfway to-night and the rest to-morrow."

"Camp out, you mean?"

"Sure, unless you want t' drive all night."

"No—that will be right with me, whatever you say. You are Mr. William P. Watson?"

"Oh, that ain't all necessary, ma'am. Call me Ace, which all my friends do."

A number of people were hanging about, curious to see the new owner of the big ranch. None of them were close friends of either Arthur or John Hones; so Ace piloted his employer up the street to the John Hones place, where John and Ma Hones, forewarned by Carmencita Lavaca, welcomed her.

There she took off her droopy hat, revealing a soft and well-colored pair of cheeks, bluest of blue eyes, and straight, tawny eyebrows that went well with her true blond hair. A quirk of humor was in each corner of her mouth at all times—so it seemed at that first meeting—and her voice was always low and not given to irritating tones.

Big, impulsive Ma Hones took the rather lonely Kansas girl to her warm heart at once: "Shucks, you'll fit in, all right. Wait till Brace Turlock comes—if he ever comes. He always did like a pretty face."

"I might not like a man that always likes a pretty face," Sally Hones interposed. "Who is this Brace Turlock?"

"Gun guard for some big mines over beyond Douglass," "Pa" Hones hastened to explain: "Art wanted him sent for so he'd clean this town up."

"Why doesn't the law do it?"

"The law isn't much on the shoot," Ace said, thinking this would explain.

"Do you mean Turlock was sent for to shoot some one?" Her eyes wide open now and her lips pursed.

"No; he was just sent for to do whatever might turn up," Ace made haste to explain further, as he thought.

Sally looked at the three of them in turn. "I hope there won't be any shooting while I'm in town. I suppose it may be necessary to have an officer of the law shoot, in defense of the law; but——" She looked from one to the other inquiringly.

Pa and Ma Hones were frowning a bit; Ace Watson began to whistle. "The town's gettin' plumb bad again," Ace told her finally; "and it's reported that that crossbreed, El Tigre Blanco, is hanging around. And the town being so bad, makes the region bad, for any one that wants t' turn a mean trick near here can get refuge in certain places in town."

"And so you want this man Turlock to come in and put an end to this badness?" her eyes wide open in the eagerness of her inquiry.

"That's just it, ma'am."

"Has he been sent for?" appealing to Ma Hones.

"Twice—but the first letter may've been destroyed when the stage was held up the night before your Uncle Art was killed. We left it to Uncle Jimmy Nolan to write another letter to Turlock; but he's gone on a visit, and there's no way of knowing if he did it. May not've; Uncle Jimmy's plumb slack, for a man."

"Has there been any clue found to point to the one who killed my Uncle Arthur?" she asked of Pa Hones.

"Not a one. We think that if some one was here that could put the right sort of fear into the hearts of some of them crossbreeds over in Chihuahua Town, I mean where the Aztecs live, some of them might talk; but until they talk, it will be kept a secret, Sally."

"We'll send for Brace Turlock again; he'd come if he got the letter," Ace felt called upon to say.

"What is there about this Turlock that will make them do as he wants them to do?" Sally leaned forward in her anxious effort to understand.

Pa and Ma Hones were laggard in finding the proper phrase, but Ace was not so tongue-tied: "Brace has got a hard pair of eyes, ma'am; and he acts hard, to back up what they say."

Ma clapped her hands thrice. The door to the kitchen opened and Carmencita came in, all smiles. She had a tray with refreshments.

"Hello; I see you've got the girl workin' in place of that black Pedro," Ace teased the girl, who showed that she liked it by making a pretty mouth at him. "Where's that 'bear' of yours, Cita?"

"Ah'm sending dhat hombre aweey weeth flea in hees ear," the dark beauty laughed.

"Get too fresh?"

"He say something fresh about Don Arturo, so we quarrel," she answered firmly.

"You didn't tell us about that part of it, Cita," Pa Hones said.

Cita did not offer any more information, but let the shell of native reserve close her lips. Nor could all their teasing make her speak again of Pedro, save to say this, as her dark eyes flashed: "Dhat pig, he is goon aweey; Ah'm done weeth dhat hombre."

Soon Ma Hones went into the kitchen on some errand. Pa Hones had business that took him down the street on some friendly errand. Ace followed Ma to gossip, leaving the girl alone for the moment. Wishing to see what sort of town it was, Sally Hones strolled out to the front of the house. Dusk had fallen, and under the overhang of the wide porch it was already dark. Sally sat near the rail, thus being not far from the walk before the houses. She listened to the sounds of the town, heard the faint music and sounds of revelry from the farther Chihuahua section; and then, through it all, came the sound of revolver shots. She started at them, and then laid them to some target practice or to some boyish prank.

Now there came to Sally's ears the steady pace of human feet. The walker was not stealthy in his movements, rather he was assured. But his pace was careful, catlike, as when a cat prowls openly and unafraid, not as when a cat slinks in ambush. The owner of those feet might have been the town's master, it seemed to Sally, as he came on from the upper town.

She bent over the porch rail to see who it was that brought this feeling of disquiet to her by his mere presence. The man paused before the house and faced her. He took the few steps needed to bring him from walk to porch. But little light came from the windows. She could see that he had on a steeple-crowned hat, was dressed Mexican style throughout. His eyes seemed to burn in the dark like a tiger's, yet his voice was soft and almost sweet.

"Buenas noches, señora," he said, touching her wrist.

Sally was silent. The touch felt chilly. She drew back.

The man laughed. "Do not be alarmed, Mees Hones; I mean no harm at thees time." And he glided back to the walk and down the street.

Sally started erect, hand at her throat, where a pulse was beating as if to suffocate her. She heard a slight sound, whirled to find Carmencita in the doorway, her gaze fixed on the retreating man. Sally went to Carmencita, grasped the girl's wrist and demanded: "Who is that man?"

Carmencita, taken unawares, let slip with sibilant force: "El Tigre Blanco!" Then she was silent, gazing at the man still, as at a serpent that had fascinated her.

"The outlaw chief?"

"Non! Non! I spoke too queek, señora. Eet is not so." And the girl turned and fled indoors.

"El Tigre Blanco! Could it be possible for the outlaw to come into an open town, frighten people, go about his way unrebuked? Then it is time a man like they say Turlock is, came here and took hold," the girl found herself deciding, like a flash, her pioneer spirit rising to the needs of the situation.

Sally controlled herself, then went indoors. She found Ace Watson and

Ma and Pa Hones coming from the kitchen, Pa having returned by the back-door route. She spoke to them of seeing a strange man, who had peered at her and frightened her. And she told of what Carmencita had said of him.

Ace Watson shrugged up his thin shoulders: "No use going at the girl; she's like the rest of the oilers here—the lower class. She's plumb scared of that El Tigre Blanco. She'd see him in every tree and stump along the road. The high-toned Mexicans might act different; but even they'd be afraid of him. And, for that matter, there's a lot of Americans here that's shivering because of him; so we ain't got anything to brag about."

"But what would you do, Mr. Watson," Sally asked him, "if he tried to threaten you?"

"I'd shoot him full of holes, if I could draw ahaid of him," Ace told her philosophically. "And now we'd better be hittin' the high spots on our way to X Bar H. I wish I'd brought along a few of the boys t' ride herd on us going out; but if I get those ponies straightened out on the home trail, it'll sure take a comet t' catch them up on the way."

"Does this El Tigre Blanco, then, command people hereabouts?" Sally asked.

"He throws quite a wide loop; but X Bar H will have to take a holiday from work some time and rub him off the map. Don't let him worry you, none, Miss Hones."

"You stick with Ace, and you'll come out all right;" Ma Hones reassured Sally, and Pa Hones added his voice to his wife's.

Half an hour later, as the big moon came up to gild the world, the X Bar H buckboard swung out of Altamonte. Ace lifted the ponies into a stiff lope that made the buckboard bounce and slam behind them like the tail of a kite on a windy day. The girl, holding on, felt herself bounced about rather roughly. She asked Ace if such speed was needed.

"I'm going to get as far from this man's town as I can while the gettin's good," was all the grim foreman would tell her.

After a while she asked him, as she bounced over against him: "Ace, suppose that gun fighter Turlock should meet El Tigre Blanco, what would be the result?"

"Offhand, I'd say, I'd be sorry for the Mexican; but then, he's a bad man and wouldn't give Brace an even break, if he could help it."

"An even break?" puzzled.

"Aw, you'll learn American talk, after a while," Ace replied shortly. "I mean he might shoot him in the back if he got a chance."

"Oh," she said faintly; "he might? Well, I never saw Turlock, but I hope he gets the better of the outlaw chief—no matter what he does to do it."

"Haw, haw!" Ace laughed outright, startling the ponies into a still wilder series of plunges and lunges; "that's pretty good for Kansas."

"I don't see any joke," the breathless girl answered, clinging to the seat.

"That makes it all the better, haw, haw, haw!"

To be continued in the next issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

The Border Bandit's Prize

By Max Brand

Author of "The Border Bandit's Indian Brother," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE RODEO.

IN the first place. there were ten thousand black-eyed señoritas who would have been glad to marry Diego Venustiano, and why, therefore, did he have to look north of the river for a wife? Some people said that it was because, from the day he left Old Spain, he had always had to take the hardest way to every one of his successes. The very silver which he took from the earth in such vast quantities at his mines had only been found by systematic efforts which would have killed off the strength and the patience of ordinary people. And he had filled all his life with such enormous labors that it had not been possible for him to find a spare moment in which to marry and raise a family.

No, not until he had reached the iron gray of middle age—the hard years of a very hard man—did Diego Venustiano finally stop one day in the midst of a stride as he was walking up and down the long hall which served him as a living room in his house. He had been turning over in his mind certain methods newly discovered and which, applied to his mines, might increase the huge river of his income by perhaps fifty per cent. And in the midst of these cogitations he suddenly had said: "What will become of this mountain of wealth after I am dead? And with ten thousand enemies, such as I have, who can tell when death will come?"

So mused Diego Venustiano. He sat down and remained for an hour without moving. For he felt trapped, as though life, having been defeated by him in hand-to-hand combat all his days, had finally resorted to this cowardly method of crowding him to the wall. Yes, magnificently as he had worked, all of his labors would go for nothing. He had no relative worthy of this inheritance. He had only one real friend. And that friend, perhaps, was only devoted to him for the hope he had that one day Venustiano might remember him in his will.

At least, this was the suspicion that

flashed across the mind of the rich man. And, though he immediately defended Andrea Rulliano in his heart of hearts, still he could not help feeling that a shadow had fallen across his very soul and would leave a stain there forever. He decided, before that hour ended, that he would marry as soon as possible.

But wait! Do not think that even then, so late in life, he really hurried. No; he began his quest for a wife by rebuilding his house. That is to say, he enlarged it until it was entirely another structure.

There were ten flat acres on the top of a mountain which might have had another name in the olden days; but it had been known for many years, now, as Mount Venustiano. And, in the center of this rolling land, he had built him a house. Now he used his mansion as storage space and for servants' quarters and called up a host of builders, architects, masons, stone blasters, stone hewers to rough face the mighty blocks, and deft-handed workers to give the massive rock the finish of glass. For Diego Venustiano decided that every inch of his new house into which he hoped to welcome his bride should be built as enduringly and founded as deeply as the fortunes of his family—which he trusted might run on forever.

So, first with powder and drills, they cut the massive rock away and ripped out the deep and solemn chambers which were to serve as cellars in which the treasures of a king and the wine of a pope could have been stored with ease. And then—for all this time the stone was being quarried for the walls—the house rose with wonderful suddenness.

And as it was built, it was finished with the care of a jeweler; and, while it was being finished, furniture of all kinds and rich hangings were brought to fit out the interior; and the huge water wheel in the valley, which operated the never-ending cables that dragged cars up and down from the top of the mountain, was constantly raising precious burdens for the house of the señor—so that, as the house spread, all men wondered. But, for the first time in his life, Diego Venustiano found that he had embarked upon a task in which the expense was to him the item of least consideration. All that he wished was to make sure that the place was such as would overwhelm the imagination and charm the heart of a lovely woman.

It was not a lofty structure. No, it was simply a single story, though that story was wonderfully tall and spacious. And, after the fashion of the adobe houses of Mexico, it rambled here and there with a delightful carelessness, and inclosed little gardens and cool courts arcaded with graceful columns. Diego Venustiano watched the progress of the work with a swelling heart. He began a new life. For hitherto he had made nothing in all his years save money, and now he saw that money was only a means to an end.

When this mansion was completed and furnished, only then did he think of finding the woman to place in it. But that was not a work to be done in a moment, and first he went north of the Rio Grande to look into the possibilities of certain hardy but fine cattle with which to help stock the beautiful valley at the foot of Mount Venustiano.

On that journey he rode through Siddon Flat; and, on his way through Siddon Flat, he saw a girl's face, pale, beautiful, and sad. He stopped his horse, just as he had stopped on another day in the pacing of his living room. For he knew that this instant he had seen the woman who must be his wife.

In three hours he knew all that was necessary about her. She was the daughter of a simple and poor farmer on the edge of the town. Her name was Marian Barge. And, if there was

sadness in her face, that was because she had a good reason for it. She had been engaged to a wild young giant who had disappeared a year or so before into the mountains. Perhaps the wolves had dined off his bones long ago; but she was still true to him, and would not look at the young men in the town, and spent her time caring for her father's house—which was work enough, seeing that Samson Barge had been badly broken in an accident some months before, and ever since kept to his bed.

So Diego Venustiano had himself introduced to Samson Barge, and to the sick man he opened his heart. He told him the truth with brevity and with warmth. He described his wealth and his house, both waiting for a mistress.

And Samson Barge said in the end: "All these here things would be enough to turn the heads of most girls. But I dunno about Marian. She's in the next room. You ask her."

It seemed wrong to Diego Venustiano. He suggested that there should be time for a courtship, first of all.

But Samson Barge shook his head. "She'll never marry you for love," said he. "Because all the love that's in her is for another man. But if you want her anyway—why, talk to her. It ain't in me to try to persuade her, though she leads a dog's life here, slaving for me."

So Venustiano went to Marian and sat before that pale girl—and he was pale himself, you may be sure—and laid his proposition before her in grave, cold words, just as he would have outlined any business proposition. Only his eyes were somberly eloquent. She told him with equal gravity and coldness exactly what her father had said before. She loved another man. And she did not think that her heart would ever change. But she knew—who did not in that country—of the wealth and the name of Venustiano. And, if some of that wealth could be used to give her father the care which he needed, to lift him from this abject poverty——

"There is no need to buy my help by marrying me," said Diego Venustiano, his heart freezing with grief. "I shall make your father comfortable."

"That would be something for nothing," said the girl. "We cannot take charity."

He went away to think it over. It was very unromantic. To take to that magnificent house a girl with no love for him and so mismated in age! And yet, as he thought of it and as his mind grew more fixed upon her, he was sure that no other woman could ever take her place. And there was enough passion in him, finally, to waken love in her at last. It would come, say, with the first child. Ten thousand better men than Venustiano have argued with themselves in the same manner, you may be sure.

So they reached an agreement; and Venustiano went hastily back to his home to prepare, leaving behind him in Siddon Flat such a provision for Samson Barge that that honest man heard of it with a burning face.

"It ain't right!" he told Marian fiercely. "Honey, ain't you selling yourself for my sake and not for your own happiness?"

She managed to talk him out of that. And, as for the future, a married life—why, this world is not for dreams and dreamers, she had come to believe. There is very little that happens as we would have it.

Back in his own country, Venustiano had mounted to a seventh heaven of expectancy and hope and joy. He went straight to the old house of his one friend, Andrea Rulliano. To Don Andrea and to the Señora Rulliano he opened his heart. He would send for this girl. He wished to let her see the country and the people before the marriage. And would the señora be hostess to the girl and keep her in her house?

Señora Rulliano would be delighted.

So, with that decided, Venustiano went ahead to the next step. This girl must be introduced to the country in such a fashion that the people who looked upon him as the king of the countryside would be prepared to welcome her as the queen, also. She must step upon this new stage in a proper setting, and so Don Diego arranged a ceremony which would fittingly fill the eye of the country folk.

It was to be such a rodeo as had never been seen before in all of Mexico. There would be enough cattle barbecued to feed ten thousand. And at least that many would ride across the mountains to enjoy the ceremonies. There would be prizes, too, sufficient to bring every capable young man in Mexico to the games. And, to crown all, Marian Barge, who distributed the prizes, would be announced at the close of the festival as the betrothed bride of Venustiano.

But, ah, Diego Venustiano, who will summon the whole world to come and look at a jewel before it is really his? Are there not thieves?

CHAPTER II.

FLINDER.

WHEN I think of Diego Venustiano, I am amazed. For it is a proof that if a man grows very old and wise in some ways, he will remain a child in others. This miner had learned how to follow a silver vein almost by instinct. He had made enough money to buy out a national mint. And he had shipped his bullion safely by mule train through regions infested with outlaws but who dared not touch his goods—except for that one wild exception of Roderigo Venales, of course.

But here was Diego Venustiano, whose mine was a precise and well-oiled machine in most respects, now become a veritable child in regard to his marriage. Let me give one example. It occurred to him, as a sort of afterthought, that at a marriage there must be a priest to officiate. Well, for that matter there were plenty of priests in the community. And it would be a simple matter to bring a dignitary to his house.

But that would not do. It did not fit into the fairy picture which Venustiano was painting for that marriage, for the future life he was to lead with his bride. He wanted to be married to Marian Barge by a priest who would stand to him in the position of the archbishop to the king—in the days when the archbishop was appointed by the crown.

So he stamped his foot, as you might say, and a fine church sprang up in the valley. It was built only of adobe; but then, adobe churches will outlast five hundred years if they are the right kind; and this was distinctly the right kind. But was it to be a ghost of a church, surrounded by the empty fields?

He stamped his foot again, and a village sprang up around the knees of the lofty church, for Venustiano had checked out a section of his rich valley lands, fenced them in from the cattle, and allotted half interests in the patches of ground to those who cared to farm. Instantly the agriculturalists swarmed in to take advantage of that generous offer. And, in a month, with the help of the patron, their pleasant, simple houses had been built, their little vegetable and flower gardens laid out; and the rain and sun made the village bloom. And the great Venustiano let his will be known to the priesthood.

Of course, he was listened to with awe and reverence, as a holy man. For is not that man holy who builds churches in a wilderness and surrounds those churches with worshipers by the villageful? An able, gentle, young ascetic came to rule this new flock—a youth with a starved face and tender

eyes like a saint, who could tame the worst outlaw in the mountains with a single glance.

So this part of the ceremony was prepared for. But what could have been less like the work of a man and more like the way of a child? However, Diego Venustiano was not attempting to be logical or sensible. He was only being happy, spending money by the hundred thousand, and spreading his elbows at the board of prodigality.

It had an effect, too, this change in the great patron. For the mountaineers had looked upon him before as upon an eagle, sitting on a mountaintop, or as a gloomy miser, living in a castle with his wretched wealth. But suddenly it appeared that in some miraculous manner his heart had been touched. And many people attributed the miracle to the gentle young priest in the valley in the new church, forgetting that the cause must come before the effect. However, it was plain that the patron was transformed. He had been one who took. He was now one who gave. And suddenly a thrill of wonder and of affectionate awe spread through their hearts. It was the coming of spring for the fame of Venustiano.

And, no matter how childish you may call it, these were good things, and in a sense rather great things, that Diego was accomplishing. Even the rodeo which he planned with such care was a harmless affair. If it was a mistake, it was because he was too confident. But that is to be shown afterward.

In the meantime, it became known that an American girl had entered the country. She was a friend of Señor Rulliano, it appeared, for she was living in his house; and she was being introduced by his wife, busily, to the few great families in the mountains—overlords of valleys, of forests, of thronged domains of cattle. But no one, except the Rullianos, knew that there was any relation between the arrival of this girl and the great works of Don Diego. No one would have been able to guess it, seeing her pale face and her unassuming way.

Least of all would any one have connected her with this wonderful preparation for the rodeo. And what a rodeo it was to be! For Don Diego had prepared prizes to be dreamed of, but never to be matched. To the best rider, a fortune in pesos! Silver money, so that you will know that you have received your full price! And for the best roper, another fortune! And for the best trick rider, also money! And Indians will be allowed to compete. Then there will be killing before the affair is over, you may be sure of that! And, for the best hand at bulldozing grown steers, a great reward!

What, is the money never to cease flowing? The price of a thousand, two thousand days of work for a little exhibition of skill during five minutes? Men will come from the ends of the Americas for the sake of such an affair!

"Ah, let them come! Let them come!" said Don Diego. "Goodmen knows that they shall be welcome. There will be food and shelter for every one. I have bought canvas. There will be a white field of tents put up around the village. Whole herds of fine young, fat cattle are ready for the butcher. And there are trainloads of sweets in preparation, and tons of bread and vegetables and beans, and all that the heart of man can wish for, and great tuns of wine and vats of beer."

Tush, you cannot keep good news. It will slip away like quicksilver and course through the veins of the world. And the tidings of the preparations in the valley of Venustiano spread like oil over water! Mount your horses and pull the cinches tight. Get to the valley. You may be sure that you will never regret the going if it be only to watch, eat, drink, sing, listen. To say

nothing of those who can join in the feats of skill!

But still, though all these mighty movements were going forward, Don Diego could not quite be sure that he had a proper crown for the celebration. And he cast about him daily in the search for a climax. Not easy to find a climax! You cannot readily balance a mountain on top of a mountain. However, he did not cease hoping, and finally he heard by chance of what he wanted.

Flinder was taken at last, the great white horse which had coursed like running fire through the mountains, which had broken into a hundred corrals and run off with the stock, which had captured whole herds of saddle nags with the magic of his free-ringing neigh. Flinder had been taken, that great, white shooting star of the mountains!

Oh, and he had been paid for! Thirty men had ridden on that heroic quest. And a score of tough mustangs had been ridden to death. And then, in the struggle to master the giant, a man had been killed and another man maimed. And after that, in the attempt to ride this thirteen-hundred-pound monster, the first rider had been crushed to death and the second had been almost kicked in two.

Three men killed, and the injured make a grisly list! They would hang a dozen men for such murders. But Flinder is different. He is only the more admired, the more desired, for his dreadful deeds—fighting for liberty and willing to kill himself while he strives to get it. But, at last, by starvation, by patience, by craft, by wisdom, by might of hand from a dozen men, he is mastered. He is taught to answer the bridle. He can be ridden—not easily. But, at least, it is possible for a fine horseman to stay in the saddle!

"I have it!" cried Diego Venustiano. And he laughed and struck the shoulder of Rulliano, who happened to be with him.

Rulliano looked at him askance. "You have what?" he asked. For his old friend daily amazed him.

"I have the crown for my rodeo. I shall buy Flinder and offer him for a prize for the best marksman. Eh?"

"Buy Flinder?" cried Rulliano. "Buy what you will, but you will never be able to buy Flinder—not for three thousand pesos!"

"You shall see—you shall see!" He called to him a most trusted emissary. "Take six of the best riders on my range," said Don Diego. "Here is gold. Bring me back Flinder."

And so Flinder was brought. And ever the stern heart of Venustiano leaped when he saw the horse. But still his purpose held. It should be a mere prize in this rodeo. Men would speak of this generosity. And perhaps—who knows—this would be the white lightning stroke that would open the heart of pale and lovely Marian with awe and wonder, and let love come slipping in.

And Don Diego began to look upon the stallion as a gambler looks upon an ace. For what would Marian think, then, when she saw her betrothed give away as a prize in an entertainment for her honor a gift which an emperor might have valued more than the most precious jewel in his crown?

But, alas, Diego Venustiano, the honey which calls the bees to you will call the hornets also! For the word has gone forth. And wild and desperate men have heard that Flinder is indeed to be the prize. And if you fear thunderbolts, then fear the powers which this magic of yours is assembling, Don Diego!

CHAPTER III.

THE GUNMEN COME.

BUT in fact poor Venustiano had no fear. He lived in a rarefied atmosphere. He walked above the clouds of

doubt, at this time; and, therefore, any cowardly and base suggestions of gloom he would have shrugged away as in duty bound. Not to be happy and confident, he felt equivalent to a criticism of his lady.

And the longer Marian Barge remained in that country, the more certain he became that she was perfect. She was not witty; she was not very gay; she was neither wise nor eloquent. But she was simple, kind, and pure; and those three qualities, in the eyes of Don Diego, were worth a whole ocean full of accomplishments. She had no artistic gifts. She could neither draw nor play German music. But she could sit at the piano and sing folk songs of the West and the South of her own country in a way that brought the tears to the eyes of the proud Spaniard and made his breast swell. He knew that she was not happy. But she never complained, and she never repined; and, with a courage worthy of a man, she lived up to the letter of the bargain she had made.

Sometimes, when he looked at her gravity and her gentleness and her sorrow, Don Diego was overwhelmed with a sort of religious awe. He used to rush away and find Padre Ricardo, the young priest, and pour out his heart to him. Or else Don Diego would suddenly make a vast resolution and set about carrying it into effect.

It is hard to believe that these impulses of compunction could lead to such great results; but, as a matter of fact, a fine hospital was built in Mexico City and endowed for the poor. And this was the effect of Marian Barge on the Spaniard. And he did other things, like an emperor, or a madman, or a lover. Or like all three rolled into one person!

And, in the meantime, people were flooding into the valley long before the rodeo. Your Mexican is either a day late or a day early. And, in the case of such an event as this, they did not care if they were a fortnight beforehand. They came in droves—men and women and even children, because whole families had left their flocks and their little farms and come down to see the festivities. And they wanted, as you might say, places in the front rank.

Don Diego made all welcome. The city of white tents grew steadily larger outside the village which had been built. The market place was thronged. And in the great eating rooms which he had built, and where the inside of these barnlike structures was made alive and gay with sinuous colored-paper streamers, long tables were laid out thrice a day; and he who wished might come here and dine. Do you wonder, then, that the thousands were trooping in.

Señora Rulliano walked with her young guest in front of her house, which stood on a hill on the farther side of the valley. Time was when the Rullianos had owned all of that valley. But that was before the coming of Don Diego. Now, in the middle of the plain, they could see the white-walled houses of the town and the snowy tents circling about it.

"Look, Marian, my child! It is all for you! Everything that you see is for you, alone. And doesn't it fill you with awe, a little?"

"It will be such a show," said the girl thoughtfully, "that, even if one of the principal actors were to fall out, certainly another would simply be brought in; and the play would not be stopped."

At this, the señora looked sharply at her companion and frowned; and that evening she said to Andrea Rulliano: "I tell you, Andrea, that slip of a girl does not understand. She thinks that Venustiano is amusing himself like a child. And these tremendous preparations don't seem to move her. As a matter of fact, it's plainly to be seen that she doesn't love poor Diego a whit; and it's your duty, my Andrea, to tell

him what he must expect from his wife."

Don Andrea was a man who had been in politics for a certain time. He had not remained there very long, for the very good reason that a bomb had been cast at his feet, one day. A devoted peon picked up the bomb and ran out of the room with it, and was blown to heaven as a reward for his devotion. But Don Andrea, though he never became important politically, learned some truly political lessons, and, among the rest, he knew that all men will eventually do exactly what they wish to do, and that nothing which we attempt on our part can really change them without leaving a feeling of malice toward us.

Don Andrea knew this; and so he replied to his wife, "I think you don't understand, my dear, that Don Diego is in love."

"I have reason to forget," she exclaimed bitterly, "that there is such a thing as real passion in this world!"

"I love to see you moved, my bird, my pet," said Don Andrea. "Flutter your wings again. It is immensely becoming."

"You detestable——" breathed his better half, and left the room.

But that was the end of the warning which Don Diego should have received, and which might have had some influence upon him, though that is rather doubtful. And all went marching forward triumphantly toward the great opening day.

The center of everything, however, was not Don Diego himself, but the white horse, that creature winged with speed—Flinder! The animal was kept in a circular fifty-acre field surrounded with a strong ten-foot fence. There he sported every day and drank the water of the little brook that crossed the meadow, or grazed upon the good grass, or enjoyed the shade through the heat of the day beneath big trees.

And all day people watched him with hungry eyes—men and women and children who had been raised to the important knowledge that the most important of all the treasure which can fall into the hands of a man is a fine horse; and here they were seeing, as they felt, perfection. So they stared and gaped and hungered. Everything that was known about him was repeated around the ample margin of that fence. And a thousand things untrue were attributed to him. He was worth a great deal of talk.

When he grew tired of the lazy life in the meadow, after the wild days of freedom which had so robed his body with iron strength and beauty, he would break into a gallop and swing round and round the inclosure almost too fast for the eye to follow the action of his legs. For he was standing on four dark stockings; and, when he began to move rapidly, then his legs seemed to disappear; and he was simply a white streak supported by invisible legs. And beneath him there merely was seen the winking of the sun upon the polished ebony of his flying hoofs.

And, when he had finished his rounds at full speed, he invariably ended his little race by plunging to a halt in the exact center of the inclosure, where there was a low hill. There he would stand with his glorious head thrown high, his tail flung into a grand arch, with the love of freedom trembling in his body and lightning in his eyes.

Such was the stallion whom the thousands came to see, and, as time went on, and as the days for the rodeo grew nearer, people began to feel that all that went before really hardly mattered at all. Even the magnificent prizes for roping, for riding, and the rest, seemed nothing. And all the other lesser prizes, for boxing, running, leaping, wrestling, throwing the weight, were hardly worth the attention of the crowd. There were hosts to contend for all of

these prizes, of course; but the heart of the crowd had nothing to do with them. Their interest was centered on the great stallion and the contest which would be held for possession of him.

Presently, as the hour drew nearer, men of a different sort entered the raging, boisterous, wine-flowing city of Don Diego Venustiano. You could pass down the street and pick out these men with casual glances, for they were different from the rest. They would be seen standing in obscure corners, with preternaturally active eyes surveying all around them. Or they would be sidling down an alley, but always you could be sure they would have a stout stone wall at their backs! These men wore two guns very low down along their thighs, where the tips of the fingers were continually brushing against the handles. And the holsters were sure to have a worn look.

Or else, perhaps, there would be no gun at all showing, but you would see these pistol experts wearing very open, loose coats; and then you could be sure that the weapons were carried under the coat. And there were double-barreled pistols, and single-barreled, and long ones huge enough to throw a bullet that might knock down a horse, and long ones, slender and delicate, intended to strike a small mark and kill by delicate precision rather than by size and mere violence. And there were even, here and there, a few models of that new fashion of short gun which was becoming more and more popular with the passage of every year in the Western mountains—the revolver. And yet only a few had appeared this far south. The gun remained a good deal of a mystery.

But these fellows with the rather reserved manner, fond of lurking in corners, and always sure to have their backs guarded by a strong wall—these fellows were most apt to have the new-fashioned revolvers, because it was their business to keep distinctly up to date in such matters. They either kept up to date or they died young. And the crowds which circulated through the town of Venustiano knew who these fellows were. They were the gun experts who had come into the valley to contest for the possession of the white stallion. A quiet, soft-spoken, silent-stepping lot they were; and people avoided them as animals avoid poisonous snakes. But Diego Venustiano was delighted, and he said:

'I have gathered the deadliest lot of gun fighters in the history of the world. And the rodeo will be famous forever!" He had become mad, you would say. He was now rejoicing in the strength of the explosive which he was trying to manipulate with his bare hands!

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE ARENA.

EVEN the buzzards in the sky were excited and gathered by the dozen, hanging in the air on tireless wings above Mount Venustiano to tell one another that never before had there been so many living creatures in the valley; and Don Diego, looking up in the air, seemed to feel his fortunes menaced by the living circle which these birds of ill omen kept in the heavens above him. He fell into a fury and ordered them destroyed, but even his oldest retainers merely gaped at him. For does one go gunning for birds that hang half a mile up in the sky? Such a silly superstition troubled Venustiano for a moment only. Then he turned his face forward to the other events of the day.

The rodeo was to begin. Lists had been set off behind barriers as if for the contests of chivalrous knights. Great bleachers had been built all around it. And the air above the bleachers was sure to be filmed over with a thin mist of dust which was constantly rising from the great corrals near by,

where the wild horses—the fuzz-tails—were kept for the riding contests. And there were the corrals for the steers, also, which were to be roped, thrown, and tied. And there were the stout yearlings, to be handled in the same manner.

They not only raised a dust with their constant milling, but they also kept a constant clamor in the air, with the bawling and the booming of the cattle and the shrill squeals and the brazen trumpetings of the fuzz-tails.

Don Diego looked upon this slight confusion with a pardonable satisfaction. It was the aura of excitement which should properly surround an affair such as this one which he was creating.

The time came for the opening ceremony. It was a solemn parade, which began on the broad top of Mount Venustiano and wound down the sides of the mountain and across the narrow strip of level, and through the little new town by the river, and into the arena.

At the head went one band. At the rear went another. There was need of that much martial music, for the cheerful and loud tunes which the first set of musicians sent thrilling through the air were soon trampled out and drowned by the stir of trappings, the squeaking of saddles, the roll of voices, and the stamping of hoofs. And there was need for the second band at the rear; and, even so, halfway between the two, in the very center of the procession, there was a region in which one would be very conscious of confusion, but of no music whatever.

Behind the first band came the "quality" of the mountains, representatives of the oldest and the best families, many of them descended through the centuries straight from the conquistadors to whom little principalities had been assigned out of the vast domain of Cortez. And they were a little less proud, perhaps, than archangels, and a little less haughty than hot-blooded steeds. They came to smile at this rude festivity. And they came to shrug their shoulders at the nouveau rawness of the wealth of Don Diego. However, he was not the son of a nobody in Old Spain. And he could be forgiven for having made his millions by the labor of his own brain and hands, though they, for instance, were much too good to envy him such occupations.

But secretly they had been eaten up with curiosity to see the new house of this palace builder. And they had been struck chill with awe as they strolled through the great halls and the flowering courts and the fountain-cooled patios of the Casa Venustiano. There was certainly no other residence in Mexico like it. They felt really more wonder than envy. They had seen such a place of beauty!

And more than one young, dark-eyed beauty felt a secret leaping of the heart at the idea that some woman, some day, was sure to become the mistress of all of this magnificence. Such thoughts were rapidly communicated. And Don Diego, who certainly had never been much of a social favorite in the years that went before, even after his wealth had been mounting into the complicated millions, now found himself suddenly showered with invitations. He was wanted here, and he was wanted there. He found that, in building his house and arranging his rodeo, he had made himself a necessary part of the "better" people of the mountains.

And he did not even smile, for he understood these things. He was too seriously bent on watching one face in all that crowd, moving always at the side of Madame Rulliano, a little less pale than usual—yes, actually clapping her hands together as she passed breathless through the magnificence of room and court. After all, Don Diego was not an entirely unwise enchanter! And even if this girl were the least mer-

cenary and the most self-sacrificing soul in the entire world, still she could not help feeling that life with *any* husband in such a mansion would perhaps be tolerable.

And so they had passed out and joined in the procession, the Rullianos and Marian Barge with the rest, with Don Diego following the "quality," as a king might follow his nobles. And all of Don Diego's household rode around him and before and behind him.

You would have been astonished to see how many of them there were. Don Diego himself had been amazed when they were mustered—all the gardeners and house mozos and stable boys and grooms and hunters and cooks and a whole corps of mechanics, to say nothing of a select bodyguard of fifty fine shots and expert riders. Many would take part in the competitions who habitually rode with the silver trains which he dispatched now and again across the mountain trails.

After the great household of Don Diego came the columns of the competitors, light-footed youths who would run in the foot races, and heavy-shouldered men who would box with bare hands, and ponderous wrestlers, and mighty weight throwers. And then there were the contestants for the riding prize, most of them fellows that sat just a trifle askew in the saddle, they had so often been battered and beaten and smashed in their dangerous business in life. Then came the bulldozers of grown steers, men both daring and mighty. And there were the expert ropers, men of all kinds, young and old, thin and fat; because dexterity with a rope is a gift and may have been bestowed upon the youth or the old man. And there were many men of all kinds following for the other prizes.

But last of all came a silent legion of dark-faced, solemn men, keeping each a good distance from the other, never hurrying their horses. And what horses! Looking at those mounts, one could not help wondering why any of these fellows should ask for a different charger, for each was more beautiful than the last and more earmarked for speed. But then, looking more closely at the faces of the riders and their restless eyes, one could realize that in horseflesh only the very best could satisfy them. For a difference of a second in a mile might, on many occasions, mean life and death to them.

When the procession reached the village, where the women and the children and all the men who were mere spectators were grouped, then there were respectful cheers when the head of the columns passed. Wild shouts and rejoicing greeted the great "patron" and his household; and there was noisy excitement, also, as the various contestants passed, until it came to the contestants in marksmanship—the gentlemen who would match their skill with one another for the sake of that greatest of prizes, Flinder.

Silence fell on the crowd. They drew back a little and looked upon these men with wide, frightened eyes, knowing well enough that most of these faces were not meant to be exposed to the light of day except when sheltered by a black mask, and guessing, perhaps, that there was hardly a gun in any of those holsters that had not a notch or two filed into its handle.

So the procession went on; and, at its end, like dust after a wind, came a trailing, whirling march of little boys.

In the meantime, the head of the long files had reached the arena. And the band marched in, blaring forth its noisiest music. On the southern side of the lists, where the sun would not shine in the eyes of the watchers, there was a large dais; and there the gentry of the mountains found comfortable chairs waiting them, and plenty of room for each, and cushions to put them at their ease, with ushers to show them to their

W3
WB

places and then wait upon them when they were seated under the canopy which had been raised here against the sun.

They had fine European wines served them. But for the multitude which swept among the benches looking for a front-rank place there was other entertainment, beer and, above all, the favorite pulque, fresh made, cool, and with a taste which the Mexican loves above all else in the world! From long booths that refreshment was served to them; and up and down the aisles in the bleachers, all day long, sweating boys carried the beer and the pulque busily—all free of charge.

In the meantime, the arena was filling rapidly. Some men had laughed when they saw the vast extent of ground which Don Diego had fenced off for his lists; and they had openly laughed when they saw the crowded rounds of the benches. But now they laughed no more; for a veritable ocean of humanity was pouring into the place, and benches filled in whole sections at a time, and the shrill voices of disputants over favored seats rang and reechoed across the field. Indeed, it was found that not enough seats had been built; for, after all the benches were filled, there were still ranks which had to be content to stand on the parapet at the rear.

But it was a splendid spectacle, that bowl of people waiting for the good things which Don Diego had arranged for their eyes. What excitement! Even the gentry from the mountains—even those oldest descendants of the famous conquistadors—could not contain themselves, but broke forth into whispers and murmurs.

However, Don Diego looked at only one face. He watched Marian Barge, to see whether or not she were stirred. And, for the first time, he saw that she had discarded all grief. She was like a happy child, looking here and there. And now, at last, he made sure that he should be able to win her love.

Alas, Diego Venustiano, do not forget Flinder and the strange men who have come to join the contest for which he is the prize!

CHAPTER V.

"BEFORE THE END OF THE DAY."

ASIDE from the Rullianos, no person in all the assemblage had the slightest idea that the festival had anything to do with the presence of the "gringo" girl who sat there on the dais among the great folk of the land. But they began to suspect that she might be a person of eventual importance when it was learned that she had been chosen for the graceful task of presenting the prizes. And, for that purpose, she had a special place in front, like a little throne, to which each victor was escorted and where he received his due reward.

For three days they came up to her one by one, slender foot racers, brawny wrestlers, grim-faced riders, and all the rest. But even Marian Barge was taking these matters casually, for the fever which gripped the rest of the crowd had taken her, and she looked forward only to the contests with weapons which were to close the last afternoon of the great rodeo. No matter what heroic deeds and what feats of skill, knife and gun would eventually fill the eyes of the spectators.

There had been a sanguinary suggestion made to Señor Venustiano that the knife contests should be arranged as actual fights—perhaps with somewhat blunted weapons. But he would not listen to that. For five hundred pesos, he knew that some of those savages would find a way of driving even a blunted point into the heart of a rival. So it was all a contest at targets.

And what a group stepped forward to try their fortune at the game! Young

and old, big and lean, there were half a hundred fellows, each of whom had a deadly fame in his home community for his skill with the naked steel. And they were ready to gauge their prowess against that of the rest of the world. Take them north of the Rio Grande, and they might have found sundry Texans who would have yielded to no men in their ferocious willingness to fight out a battle by means of the big bowie knives. But these experts could use a knife as a hand sword or javelin. They had grown up with the steel in their fingers, and the tricks which they performed with it were wonderful to observe.

There was an elimination contest, in the first place, in which the contestants threw three knives in succession at a round target with a bull's-eye; and, from the first trial, there emerged six champions to dispute the final struggle.

And, as they threw, a lieutenant leaned beside the chair of Don Diego and whispered at his ear, "Señor, one of the men in the field now is a member of the gang of Roderigo Venales, and it is said that Venales himself has come to the rodeo to-day!"

Don Diego stirred like a lion in his chair. "He would not dare," said he. "I know that Venales is a slippery and daring rascal, but he would never dare to put himself within the reach of my hand after robbing me as he has done."

However, he added suddenly, "Which of the knife throwers is said to be of the band?"

"The little man," said the informant. "He who is taking his stand just now."

"When I saw them all," said the master, "I recall none of them being as undersized as that. I don't think that Venales would have such a little man in his crew."

"Look!" said the lieutenant. "He has struck the very center of the target!"

It was true. The goal had been removed to almost twice the distance at which the first shots had been thrown; but the first knife of the little man landed fairly in the middle of the bull's-eye, and there was a shout of appreciation from all who could see.

"It may have been a chance score," said Don Diego calmly. "I don't think that such a fellow——" He paused.

The second knife had glanced from the hand of the little man, and it quivered in the target at the very side of the first.

"It may be," said Don Diego. "He has skill enough to be wanted by Venales. By Heaven, you are right; and that, most probably, is one of Venales' murderers!"

For, as he spoke, the third knife was flung; and it landed so close to the other two that the palm of a man could have covered all three. There was prolonged shouting and cheering at the sight of this. For the knife, after all, was the weapon cheap enough and common enough for all to possess, whereas the pistol, and particularly the new-fashioned revolvers, cost a small fortune. And so all the common herd were delighted to see the effectiveness of their national weapon vindicated in this fashion; and many a boy, as he watched, set his teeth and swore that he would practice hours and hours a day, until he should be able to do just such a thing as this and before even so many people.

"For a clever rascal like that," said Señor Indorno, a great cattle king, turning to Don Diego, "what is the use of a gun, which makes noise and cannot kill any more effectually than a heavy knife placed like that."

"It is a light throwing knife that they are using," suggested some one.

"Tush!" said Indorno. "I heard the thud as it struck home! And those three blades are buried half their length in the soft wood."

The knife-throwing contest ended

suddenly. The rest of the candidates for the prize seemed unnerved by the uncanny skill of the little man, and presently he came to receive his award.

"Go down and look closely into his face," said Don Diego. "I wish to make sure. If he is really one of Venales' men, he will have his neck stretched from the tallest tree on Mount Venustiano before the morning comes."

So the spy of Don Diego stood close, very close, to Marian as the little man came before her. He was an ugly, dark-faced fellow, with rather wide shoulders and very long arms; and, when he came before her and lifted his sombrero to salute her, he stared straight into her face with a boldness that made her own eyes waver. It almost disconcerted her in the little speech which she had to make with the bestowal of each award:

"This prize is given to you by Señor Venustiano, because you are worthy of it, and because he hopes that you will wish to remember this as a happy day."

The little man, in reply, murmured something so very low that none could make out what he had said except the girl herself, unless it was the emissary of Don Diego, who had pressed up close to the very back of Marian. Even he could not believe the thing he thought he heard. He stepped hastily to the side, so that he could scan her face; but all that he saw in her eyes was question and bewilderment. He hastened back to Don Diego.

"And what did you see?" asked Venustiano.

"I saw a man who looked ten times more formidable at close hand than from a distance. I saw enough to make sure that he was hardy enough to have been selected even by Venales. Yes, and even as one of Venales' best men! But that, after all, was not the strangest part of the affair."

"Not the strangest part? Not strange that outlaws who have plundered me should come to take part in this rodeo? Have him watched through the crowd."

"I have sent two men to trail him constantly. You shall have him the moment that you wish."

"You have a reasonably good head on your shoulders," admitted Venustiano almost grudgingly. "Now, tell me, if you can, the part of the affair that was more remarkable."

"It was this," replied the other. "I stood at the very back of the señorita, as you commanded. And so my ear was hardly farther from this little man, the prize winner, than her own. And I heard her make her little speech to him as she gave him the gold—a whole handful. He replied in a rapid voice, pitched very low; and he was looking into her eyes, not mine, which made it easier for her to hear than for me. And yet I thought that I made some sort of sense to his words—and very strange sense, at that!"

"Continue," said Venustiano kindly. "If it was merely an oddity at which you guessed, I shall not be harsh about it. What did you think that you heard?"

"I thought," said the fellow, "that I heard him murmur rapidly, 'He will come before the end of the day!' "

" 'He will come before the end of the day!' " echoed Don Diego.

"Yes," said the other, "that was exactly what I thought that I heard. I couldn't be sure."

" 'He will come before the end of the day!' " repeated Don Diego heavily.

And he looked down to the dusty floor of the arena in dismay. He could have ventured his life on the truth and the purity of the girl. And yet who could tell whether or not she might have buried in her heart the recollection of another man—this same giant lover of hers about whom he had been warned in Siddon Flat; and what was more likely than that this very man might have come to the rodeo about which

the half of the world must have heard by this time!

He looked slowly back to the face of his lieutenant. The latter was a trusty creature of his, a sort of extra pair of legs who for fifteen years had scampered on errands for Venustiano, and who had by this time no wits of his own and no desire for anything except to please his master.

"You have probably heard nonsense, Federigo," said the master as calmly as he could. "And what was the bearing of the señorita at that time?"

"I stepped to the side where I could look at her as closely as possible, and it seemed to me, señor, that she appeared baffled and surprised; and she looked after the man as though she would have called him back to her and asked him to explain. However, he went straight away. I merely paused to send two men to follow him and keep him in view. And then I came to you to report."

"Your ear has played you a trick, and that is all," said Venustiano. "However, keep on the alert. Send for young Warne. It is said that he had seen the faces of half of the band of Venales. And, if the scoundrel has actually dared to bring his men down to this rodeo—— Go, send for Warne at once!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE BLOND GIANT.

ANXIOUS only to execute each mission in turn and execute it well, Federigo was off like a ferret. But he sensed a bit of a mystery in this affair; and, being not quite a machine, but something of a man as well, he could not help hoping that he might be able to unravel it.

In the meantime, he found that everything was happening to make any calm investigation almost a matter of impossibility. For the time had come for the beginning of the shooting contest which was to decide the ownership of Flinder. That white beauty was now led into the arena, with a magnificent gold-worked saddle upon his back, and the flash of real jewels setting off his bridle, and his mane woven into twenty little braids, each braid finished off with a golden tuft of great richness; and he looked like a charger out of the Arabian Nights, such as Aladdin might have ridden.

There was a wild uproar when he first came in. He stopped on stiffly planted legs, and instantly a wave of silence followed, which lasted all the time that he pranced around the inner circle, while all eyes followed him in a frenzy of desire and wonder and joy.

"There will be bad shooting to-day," said Señor Rulliano. "There is always poor shooting when it is for a great prize. Some of those rascals out there, I tell you, would have calmer nerves if they were shooting at a fighting man rather than against others for the sake of Flinder. By the way, where did he come by such a name?"

"From the Indians, perhaps," said Señor Venustiano, his mind too filled with other problems to heed this.

"It's not an Indian name."

"Whatever it may mean," said another of the gentry, "it seems to me to fit him perfectly, for it suggests to me a sort of wildness, a carelessness, like a thrown spear or a flying bullet. And that's the look that Flinder has, as though there were no fear in him, eh? And enough speed to make himself vanish if he really chose to use it! I feel that there's the devil behind that horse."

"He has killed men enough to give you that idea. But that was before he was tamed."

"Tamed, do you call it? He's like a striding lion!"

"Ah, that's high spirits only. He can be ridden. He is ridden every day. Hello! What a roar! And see the smoke. It looks like a battle!"

The contestants stood in a long line, each man firing his three bullets at one of a line of targets; while his score was being marked down, he stepped back, and the next set of marksmen stepped into place.

There was little or no air just now. And the heavy black powder soon raised a cloud of smoke that lay thick along the field like a very dirty fog and half obscured the firers. The first rounds were completed and the second elimination ended; and finally there were three contestants. Three, that is to say, remaining with the rifle! And following that there would be an equal struggle with pistols or revolvers. And the grand climax would occur when those who had qualified either for rifle or revolver were to meet in the concluding contests, which would be for any sort of firearms, at the pleasure of the marksmen, fired from the back of a running horse and at moving targets. That would be, after all, the real test—the battle test, as you might say.

A lucky breath of wind cuffed the fog of smoke back and showed the contestants, one a typical vaquero and another a lean, tall man with a very dark skin and eye—a somber figure. But he who took all eyes at once was a splendid young giant with golden hair that flowed down around his shoulders—a man dressed in all the brilliancy of the Mexican gala-day costume, and yet apparently not a Mexican at all, if golden hair and blue eyes had any meaning.

He had an effect upon every one in the arena, it seemed, and chiefly upon Don Diego himself, for the latter half started out of his chair and exclaimed: "Andrea! Andrea! Attend! Do you hear?"

"I hear you," said Rulliano. "What is wrong?"

"This is a miracle such as I never expected to see with these eyes of mine. I want you to believe me, Andrea, when I tell you that—and yet I cannot believe my own eyes!"

Rulliano leaned forward and scanned the trio of marksmen with close attention. He made no comment, but calmly waited.

"I have often told you," went on the host, "about the day when the scoundrel, Venales, and his crew held up the silver train?"

"Of course, of course," said Rulliano. "There is no doubt that I have heard that story enough to know the details. What of it?"

"You remember that I have often spoken to you about the crisis when it looked to me as though my men were surely rallying to beat Venales? Yes, in another thirty seconds we would have butchered them or driven them over the cliff, I am sure."

"I remember, I remember," nodded Don Andrea. "As a matter of fact, what happened then, according to you, has always seemed to me like something borrowed from a story book. Because a magnificent, long-haired giant leaped up from the shrubbery and charged down on your line, with guns spouting fire and death from either hand; and his single-handed charge turned the tide of battle; and, in another instant, instead of driving the outlaws over the cliffs, your men were scattered, and even you yourself had become a prisoner! Isn't that the point in the story?"

"Yes," said Don Diego calmly. "You remember it perfectly. And I see that you smile at it a little!"

"I cannot help it," said Don Andrea. "Not that I think you would exaggerate, but even a Venustiano can become a little excited in the middle of a battle. Tush, man, I respect you all the more for what happened—to your imagination. But, really, do not ask me to believe that any one man could have done so much."

"It is very well," said Don Diego.

"Now I ask you what would you say if I were to point him out to you?"

"Point him out to me? Here?"

"Yes!"

"It would be an amazing thing, Diego, if such a rascal dared to show himself at this rodeo!"

"Yes, it is a thing not to be believed easily. But at the same time I wish to have you remember a detail in my description of that giant. He had long golden hair, did he not? And he was young?"

"That is true, and what of it?"

"Look yonder, at the third of those riflemen—that man upon the right. It is he."

"Impossible!" gasped Don Andrea. But he stood up, in his excitement; and he stared. "You cannot tell, Diego!" he exclaimed. "Not at this distance, where the man's face is just a blur!"

"Distance makes little difference, with him," declared Don Diego. "If he were barely discernible on the edge of the horizon, I think that I should be able to tell him, by something lordly in the turning of his head. It is the same man. I tell you, Andrea, I have no doubt whatever. I would wager ten thousand pesos that that is the very man."

"But to put his head into the lion's mouth in this manner!" cried the other. "Is that a thing to be believed, unless he's mad?"

"Mad! Perhaps he is a trifle mad. I think that every one of the outlawed fraternity who have ever laid eyes on Flinder are a little addled in their wits, as a matter of fact. They cannot keep away from him. They are mad to have him, and that is the reason that he has come down here to take his chance that I shall not remember him."

"What will you do?" exclaimed Don Andrea. "By Heaven, when I look more closely at him I really believe that the scoundrel could do the thing that you ascribe to him in the battle. He seems to have the confidence and the courage and the strength of any ten men!"

"He has," said Don Diego; "and to see him in battle is worth a year of life."

"But now what will you do?"

"What do you advise?"

"Send a dozen picked men, of course, and capture him at once, without waiting!"

"Consider, Don Andrea, that this rodeo is given by me, and this ground is really, in a way, my own place, my own house, where I have invited the rest of the world to come and make merry and be contented at the games which I am giving. And if I make an arrest in the midst of the games——" He paused.

"But consider, also," went on Rulliano, "that this rascal really cost you the price of a vast treasure—the cost of the entire train of silver!"

"Do you think that I forget that?" murmured Don Diego, with a strange smile. "But there is another thing which I have never dwelled on with you to any extent, and that is the manner in which I made my escape from the band of Venales."

"I guessed, rather, that it was the speed of your horse and the confusion of the fight."

"I tell you that it was none of those; and I should have been hanged from the edge of the trail without mercy, if this man, this golden-haired giant, had not given up all of his shares of spoil for the sake of a gift which the band was to make to him. When they agreed, he asked for me. They grumbled, but they gave me to him; and, when he had me, I thought that he intended to keep me for a high ransom. But he merely took me aside and told me that he considered me a hard-hearted scoundrel; but that he felt I was a brave man who deserved a better death than hanging by thieves, and so he set me free to go on

my own way without a penny of ransom paid."

CHAPTER VII.

"AT MIDNIGHT."

TO this anecdote Don Andrea listened, speechless with interest. "I understand," said he, "and therefore this big man has come down to the rodeo, trusting that you will do him no harm, because a long time ago he set you free."

"I don't think that's in his mind," said Venustiano. "He must know that law-abiding people keep no faith with outlaws. And what has drawn him down is the hope that he'll not be marked in the crowd or that I'll do no harm on the day of the festival. And I think, by Heaven, that that is exactly the manner in which I should act, Don Andrea. I am going to let the word go round at once. All men are free here, and no officers of the law shall touch any person for offenses in the past. Federigo! But look again at that giant, Andrea, and tell me if I have exaggerated. Have you ever seen such a man before?"

Rulliano stared again. "I never have," he admitted. "And I can almost see him, Diego, plunging down the hillside with his revolvers spouting smoke and fire. If I had been among your men, I think that I should have turned and run for safety, also. Look, they are shooting for the final rifle prize!"

It was quickly over. These men knew their business, and they were soon through with it; and, when the contest was ended, it was found that the tall, dark, ominously handsome member of the three had won the first prize, and the golden-haired giant was second.

So the winner came to Marian Barge to take his prize from her hands; and nonest Federigo took advantage of his semiofficial position to stand very, very close, from mere curiosity to see such an expert rifleman at close hand. He saw the dark-faced man take the prize without any acknowledgment except a faint murmur which certainly could have reached no ear other than that of the girl, unless it were Federigo's. Back to Don Diego went his emissary, all in haste and in excitement.

"Did you see him closely, Federigo?" asked the master.

"I saw him as close as I see you now. And now I can almost swear, sir, that I have seen him before, and that the place where I saw him was among the band of Venales. Consider, señor, that the last two prize winners have both been from that crowd of tigers."

"Let them be!" said the patron, though his face had darkened. "Let them be. For, after all, I am the host and they are in a sense my guests. They shall not be touched while they are here—the impudent scoundrels! But I pray to Heaven, Federigo, that none of them carries away the main prize of the day. This last was a surly looking fellow!"

"He had a message for the señorita, nevertheless!" said Federigo.

Don Diego was fairly raised from his chair. "What is that?" he asked sharply. "A message from another of that scum?"

"Señor, I heard him more clearly than I heard the little man. Goodness knows how it is managed, but I have always been able to gather in whispers. And I heard him most distinctly."

Don Diego drew back a little, scowling; but then he said gloomily: "Continue, then. What was the message that he brought to the señorita?"

"Ah, señor," said Federigo, "I fear that no good will come to her and that you should have given the great honor of prize distribution to one of our own people."

"Be quiet! You speak like a fool when you give advice that has not been asked for, Federigo. Tell me what you heard and not what you think about it."

"Then, señor, I tell you faithfully and simply all that was heard. It was not much, but very strange. He simply said. 'He wishes to know if he may come.'"

Don Diego changed color. "Speak again, and slowly, Federigo. You heard him say: 'He wishes to know if he may come!'"

"Those words, exactly. I know that they make very little sense, but they are exactly as I heard them."

"It is a mystery," said Venustiano. And he added grimly: "Whatever else you may do, keep this matter a secret between you and me. Do you understand me?"

"I understand," said Federigo.

"And did you observe her face?"

"I did," said Federigo. "And, though she is always pale, still at that moment I thought that she became so white that a mere candle ray would have shone through her like the sun through a translucent stone. As though she——"

"It is enough," said Don Diego. "There is no more to say. But go back, Federigo. You shall understand before the day is over why everything that touches this girl touches me, also. And I beg you to look well and closely. With the ear of a rabbit and the ear of a fox as well, Federigo!"

Federigo needed no further encouragement, but still he was called back.

"You are sure that she made no answer?"

"I had my eyes fixed on her lips. I should have known if she so much as breathed. But she did not. She returned no answer whatever, but her glance wandered out toward the field and remained fixed there."

So he left Venustiano and went back to his listening post, while a cold wave of fear and suspicion passed through the very soul of Don Diego. After all, what Federigo had said might turn out to be true enough; and he would have done better had he trusted to a girl of his own people, rather than to the daughter of a strange race. And yet he could not doubt her long.

A haze settled upon the heart and upon the mind of Don Diego; and, when it cleared, he heard a great shouting. The whole arena was ringing with it, and he looked up to see three men standing in the center. One of them was the giant of the golden head. It occurred to Don Diego that it might be a prolongation of the rifle contest. No, that was ended. They held revolvers.

He recovered from his unpleasant daydream to hear Don Andrea saying eagerly: "I have never heard of such shooting, Diego! I have had no faith in the new pistols. But now I begin to think that they are magic. Good heavens, how can they be made to fire six shots as if in a single breath—six words in rapid succession? And yet aimed shots! Did you see, Diego, that your golden man and the other big fellow did not lift their revolvers much higher than the hip?"

Don Diego had not seen, but he nodded his head. "Now I remember how he charged down the hillside," he said. "And he came firing a gun in either hand and making the shots chatter out. And he was sighting down neither gun. I thought he was merely firing wildly. I did not dream that they could have been placed shots."

"It is the other man who wins, however," said Don Andrea. "Your golden man is a close second twice, however; and, if luck goes well, he should press the others for the final contest. By Heaven, Diego, he would make a picture on the back of that Flinder, would he not?"

Venustiano did not answer. He was watching with an abstracted eye while the winner of the revolver prize strode across the field and came to Marian Barge for his prize; a man with the face and the bearing and the stride of a lion. What would happen now?

Was some mysterious stranger sending in a message by each of the winners in the competitions? And who could the man be who dared to open such a bold correspondence with her? There was murder in the heart of Venustiano as he thought of these matters. And yet he could hardly believe his eyes and ears when Federigo presently came breathless before him.

"It is the third time!" said Federigo.

"Not another?" echoed Don Diego.

"Another—and another message to the señorita!"

"It is not possible!" said Don Diego through his teeth.

"The third man—the third man from the band of Venales! And I have gathered much news, in the meantime. I have circulated the word that all men are safe with you as their host until the end of the rodeo, and even afterward, so long as they do no wrong here on the field. And that news opened mouths. We began to hear talk freely. And, in the first place, I have learned that we are right about these men. For all of the last three winners do actually come from the band of Venales."

"I have guessed as much. That last big man, especially."

"He is called the right hand of Don Roderigo."

"It is Carpio Vega, then," suggested Don Diego.

"It is that great Carpio Vega, who should be leading bands rather than following a leader, except that he has no ambition. And the winner of the rifle shoot was that other famous fighter—that man who killed four Apaches in a single day! It was Antonio Morales."

"The devil has given them courage, to bring them down here under our eyes!" said Venustiano savagely. "Morales and Vega in the very flesh—and here! Tell me, who was the little man, then?"

"He was Capiño. The thief and knife fighter!"

"I know. Why, all of these names are in the nursery stories of children. But, while you were hearing other things, what did you find out, by any chance, of the man who is sending in these messages, and what message did he dare to send by Vega?"

"I do not know who the man may be; but I know that Vega said only one word, which was: 'When?'"

"And did she answer?"

"'At midnight!'" replied Federigo.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GRINGO.

"WAIT!" exclaimed Don Diego. And then he paused and let his head fall, in the intensity of his thought.

For three days he had been living on a sort of pinnacle of glory; but now, on the last day of the great festival, a cloud had grown suddenly until it was blackening half of his sky. For it was perfectly clear, now, that some one well known to the outlaws, and perhaps one of them, was seeking an interview secretly with this girl. And it was equally clear that he was to obtain it, if she were able to grant the favor. And though he told himself that there was nothing miraculous in the desire of a man to see a girl, or of a girl to see a man, and though he vowed to himself that there could not be so much as a single shadow upon the soul of Marian Barge, yet the doubt persisted. He could not argue himself out of his gloom.

And a sudden shame possessed Don Diego that at the close of this day he was to announce to the world that he was betrothed formally to Marian Barge. A shame that even such a man as Federigo should know that there was the slightest finger of suspicion pointed at Marian.

"Federigo," he said suddenly, "what

this all means I cannot tell. Come close to me."

Federigo, trembling to find himself suddenly become a person in whom his terrible master could repose an actual confidence, bowed his head close to listen, and he heard the voice of Don Diego murmuring: "The truth is, Federigo, that this girl is to be announced as my betrothed bride before the end of this day. What these messages to her mean, I cannot say. There is no other person in the world who guesses, except you. Federigo, you must help me to solve the riddle; and you must work with sealed lips. Your very thoughts must be dead to every one in the world except to me. Do you understand?"

"I understand!" said Federigo faintly. He stood up, a little giddy, and wanted to rest his hand against one of the pillars that supported the canopy against the sun, for he felt sure that to be trusted so deeply by such a person as Venustiano was a most perilous matter.

"There are three of the men from Venales who have brought word to her," said Don Diego, "from another man who wishes to see her; and they have kept at her until at last she has consented, as you know. Now, then, the first thing is for us to guess the name of the man. Have you any thought on that subject?"

"Venales himself?" murmured Federigo.

"Venales? Never—and yet why not? Perhaps Venales! We close our eyes against nothing. Most probably it is some member of the gang, and therefore why any member other than the leader? You are right, perhaps. And I hope that you are correct, for there could be no damage in him."

He checked his thinking aloud. At least, in the sallow, unhandsome face of Venales he told himself that there was nothing which could stir the heart of a romantic girl. He sighed with relief.

"There was a former lover of hers," said Don Diego earnestly, "who left Siddon Flat a year ago and disappeared into the mountains and was never heard from again. But perhaps—who can tell?—he may have joined with Venales. That, I think, may be the clew. And now she will be willing to see him again—to say no." He bit his lip. "You understand, Federigo?"

"I understand, señor."

"Surround her with watchfulness. Be ten men in one. If this matter is brought through well and safely—do you hear me?"

"I hear you, señor."

"I shall make you rich, Federigo. I shall make you one man in ten thousand. That is a faithful promise. Never forget it!"

"I shall not!" said Federigo, beginning to tremble again; and with all his heart he wished that this girl had not been so dreadfully important, for then he thought that he might have been able to spy upon her far more easily and with quieter nerves.

"Take yourself away. Come back instantly when there is anything to report. And, first of all, tell me who is that yellow-haired giant in the field. I already know that he is one of Venales' men."

"I have heard everything," said Federigo. "And it seems that the young giant is the very greatest of them all."

"Except Venales himself, you surely mean?"

"Greater than Venales. They obey Venales because he leads them to money. But they love Don Olivero."

"Olivero. He is a Mexican, then?"

"Not with that hair, señor. He is a gringo."

"With a Spanish name?"

"They have changed his name, perhaps. He is Olivero Tay. And the men of Venales love him like a father

or a brother. They would die for him."

"How did you learn this?"

"From a shepherd, just now, who has been drinking too much pulque and cannot keep his tongue in order. When he sees this Señor Tay, his head begins to nod; and he goes through the crowd telling how he was hurt by a fall, and how some of the men of Venales found him, and how this giant, Tay, picked him up and carried him half a mile on his shoulder, as though he were a light parcel, and then put him down and took care of him and bandaged his hurt. And the fellow says that Don Olivero sent the great outlaws of Venales running here and there to do his errands for him. He swears that that is the case, and that this Olivero Tay is the very greatest of them all. Greater than Venales, and greater than Carpio Vega even!"

"Great enough to stretch a hangman's noose, some day," said Don Diego gloomily, "or great enough to stop a half-inch bullet! Now go back and find out what more you can. Forget the gringo. Learn if Venales himself is here."

But if the mind of Don Diego was anxiously taken up with such reports and with such ideas as this, the rest of the crowd was not troubled in the same fashion; and, for them, there existed nothing of importance in the world except the wonder as to who would be successful when all of the preliminary contests were over and the last struggle for Flinder had been concluded.

Those preliminaries were ended at this moment. Six men had been weeded out from the scores of contestants. The disappointed heroes fell back along the edges of the arena, filled with the bitterest grief, for it was known that many of them had ridden hundreds of miles, and one man had taken his horse more than three hundred leagues in an overland voyage to make his try for Flinder. He was a failure with the rest, and only six could match wits and skill in the last struggle.

Even Don Diego showed more excitement and forgot some of his worry as he watched the men lined up for the work. They were mounted, every one of them, for it had been decided that the decision was to be made under, as nearly as possible, exactly the same conditions that a man might meet with in his normal life; and in normal life all of the mountaineers, of course, were on their horses or their mules. What horses they had, these six! One might have said that they had been selected from their compatriots not for marksmanship but for the excessive beauty of their mounts. A splendid spectacle they made as they reined in their chargers and looked carefully to their guns.

And there were three of the men who were said to belong to the band of Venales. What greater tribute could have been paid to that outlaw than to know that three of his followers had won through to the final on such a day as this! Carpio Vega on a gray horse, and Antonio Morales on a roan, and Oliver Tay on a gleaming black covered with panther mottlings, and the three other men on a cream, a chestnut, and a pinto!

They stood their horses in a row at the foot of the arena. The audience was quiet. It was not known even what the target would be, when suddenly from some boxes in a corner of the field a well-grown jack rabbit was turned loose and darted across the opening, with the shout of the crowd to give it wings, heading straight for the opposite gates.

Have you seen a jack rabbit run? No, nothing will qualify except the jack of the mountain desert. He has not a multitude of hedges to dodge through and tall grass to squat and hide in. He lives in a wilderness where it may be fifty miles to the nearest covert

and where all things pursue him—wolf and coyote with wits and speed both, and all the cat family with the subtlety of their craft and the lightning of their spring. So he has to develop the speed of a sprinter and the endurance of a bird, and like a ground-skimming bird the jack rabbit runs.

So this lanky brown creature, when it was loosed into the rodeo grounds, gave one high spy-hop, to make sure where it was and what the noise meant. Then it scooted for the farther gate, while the voice of the marshal rang out, "Shoot that rabbit, Oñate!"

Shoot Oñate did. He had his rifle across the hollow of his left arm; and he swung it instantly to his shoulder, drew aim, and fired. Alas, at just that instant the rabbit swerved. He fired again and knocked a cloud of dust over the darting creature. He sent his third shot through the jack from end to end, and the big bullet crumpled the body against the farther end of the arena.

Very good shooting, indeed, and the crowd shouted its appreciation. It doesn't sound hard, perhaps, but try it at a jack rabbit which has dissolved itself into a dusty streak across the ground. And now every one, understanding what was to be expected, stood up in their places, climbed upon the benches, and a trembling excitement lived in every face.

CHAPTER IX.

WON!

IN the meantime, Oñate, grinding his teeth with mortification because he had needed three bullets in order to put the rabbit out of the way, was half unnerved; and when a second rabbit was loosed, and he was called upon by name, he missed it utterly with the only two attempts which he had time to make with his shaking, fumbling hands.

That disposed of Oñate. He did not have to be told that such shooting would not do in this company, and he fell back with dropped head into the crowd that edged the field. Other jacks were being turned loose in rapid succession. A stolid, swart-faced man was next in line—Martinez was his name—with a double-barreled rifle in his hands and another at the side of his saddle, loaded for use.

There was no need to call upon the second weapon. The instant his name was shouted, the butt of his rifle tipped gently, unhurried, to the broad face of his shoulder, and the rabbit made its death leap before it had jumped thrice. Martinez calmly reloaded the used barrel; and, in the midst of that reloading, his name was called again, a second rabbit was loosed, and this time he finished his preparations with the same perfect calm, and the rabbit was a hundred yards away before the rifle rose to his shoulder. It was the same thing. The instant his eye caught the rabbit in the sights, the little beast was dead. There was no delay. And there was a screech of joy through the stands at the sight of such marvelous snapshooting.

The dark Morales came next. He knocked over the first rabbit with the first shot; but the second was a dodging, twisting, elusive streak, and it ran to safety. Morales was out of the competition.

"No one will ever beat Martinez!" was the general comment. "That man is a genius. He thinks with his rifle!"

The rider of the chestnut was next. He missed on his first rabbit and got the second. Carpio Vega also tried and took one out of the two, and then it was the turn of the golden-haired fellow.

A rabbit darted out, a zigzagging streak of a creature. The first shot of Oliver Tay missed; and, suddenly dropping his fine rifle, he snatched out a revolver. The first shot kicked dust over the speeding jack. The second dropped it dead.

And there was a wild uproar. That was beautiful work! Very fine shooting, indeed. But was the revolver allowed?

Certainly, announced the judges. Either revolver or rifle. The thing is simply to drop the creature dead!

Four men have been snuffed suddenly from the picture. There remains only the swart Martinez on his pinto, and the golden haired gringo.

"Look!" said Don Andrea to his host. "That giant of a fellow is good-natured. Did you see him shake hands with Martinez?"

Don Diego answered with a burst of enthusiasm, "Now that he is in this final struggle, you will see him win!"

But Rulliano shook his head. "That Martinez is simply cold death," he declared. "The man has no nerves. For did you notice? The second rabbit was loosed to him while he was in the middle of loading his weapon. But he shot and killed, just the same. Did you think, Diego, that in the entire world there were six such shots as we have just been watching?"

"I did not," admitted Don Diego with unction. "I have heard of men who could occasionally strike such targets. But these fellows are inspired. Now, look! Do you see Morales and Carpio Vega drawing up to Oliver Tay and giving him their good advice?"

"I see it. Martinez will beat him, nevertheless. And yet his long hair would fly out very well behind him, if he were to ride the great white horse."

"You will see him do it. I think you will see it."

"I have five hundred pesos that say he will not."

"You are betting on Martinez?"

"Of course. I raise my bet. A thousand on that dark-faced genius with the rifle."

"The rifle is very well, but the revolver is the new weapon. I believe in the future and the present. Martinez is from the old school. And so I take your bet, Rulliano! Haloo-o-o-o!" He gave a hunting cry with great excitement.

Two rabbits had been loosed, and darted down the field like mad things, their ears flagging back with the winged speed which they were using.

With perfect unconcern the rifle tilted to the shoulder of Martinez. He dropped the first; he missed the second. No, the rabbit was not safe. One had proof now that the motions of Martinez were deceptively swift. He had time to drop the discharged gun, and, snatching up his second rifle, he planted a bullet fairly in the body of the jack, just as it was darting across the margin of safety.

The crowd, which had been watching with held breath, screeched with satisfaction.

And now Oliver Tay?

They were instantly silent again, listening, watching, breathless.

Another brace of rabbits—and away they went, dodging like inspired devils. But what was this? The revolver leaped from its holster into the hand of Tay, and the double report was like one sound and its instant echo. And there lay two dead jack rabbits in the very beginning of their race for freedom.

The crowd was stunned. There had never been shooting like this before. And they stared in silent amazement toward the man with the flowing golden hair, mounted on the tall, black horse.

"He did not shoot like this at the target!" cried Don Andrea, bewildered and excited. "Good heavens, Diego, he was even beaten in both rifle and revolver work! But now the devil is in him!"

"He was shooting at a lifeless target before; but these are living and running creatures, which makes a difference to him. Trust me, Andrea! If there were fighting men down there, he would be

shooting even straighter. I shall take your money from you, Andrea."

"I am amazed, but still I think that Martinez will win. He is a dead shot. Will there be more rabbits? Hello, what's that?"

A pigeon had been loosed from a trap near the riders; and, as it rose, the rifle of Martinez spoke, and the bird fell. Another—and it was torn to tatters by the bullet from the revolver of Oliver Tay.

"Ride!" called the judge.

And the pair of champions started forth, trotting their horses, then cantering them. A yell of frantic applause broke from the crowd, and the noise was as instantly hushed, so that they might use all of their faculties for the observation of whatever might happen.

"Martinez, both for you!"

The swarthy man twitched his head around, and straight behind him he saw a pigeon tilting upward in the air and a rabbit loosed along the ground. With the pressure of his knees he turned the horse sharply; but, before the active pinto was cleanly turned around, a rifle bullet had found the soaring pigeon, dusted feathers from it. A second smashed the life from its shining body. Then, dropping the gun and tearing out the other rifle with anxious speed, Martinez fired at the flying rabbit—once—and again; and the rabbit was seen to stagger, and then it dragged itself beneath the gate.

There was pandemonium in the rodeo grounds. That rabbit would die, but undoubtedly it had not been struck by a center shot, for otherwise its life would have been snuffed out instantly.

What decision would the judges make? It is a score and a half for Martinez.

Now, Oliver Tay, will you match this performance? Sooner or later one has to fail entirely. And certainly a revolver is no fitting weapon with which to do long-distance shooting. He must knock down his targets at the beginning of their flight or else not at all. And shooting against birds in the air and rabbits on the ground——

Once more he and Martinez were cantering smoothly on, side by side, the golden-haired gringo smiling and cheerful and the Mexican as somberly calm as ever.

"Tay!" shouts the voice from the marshal's stand.

He rears the fine black horse on its hind legs and spins it around with unbelievable suddenness. And there is a pigeon just gathering headway—— The revolver leaps out, flame and smoke spurt from it; but the pigeon, in that instant, has swerved sideways, and the bullet is flying toward a mark that seemed no thicker than the edge of a knife and glistening illusively in the sunlight.

A miss for Oliver Tay, and the pigeon, thoroughly frightened, is scudding away with thrumming wings that thrust it off at redoubled speed every instant. Another shot; feathers fly from the bird; it turns with a sharply angled dodge in mid-air and flies straight into the face of death. The third shot brings it to the ground, turning over and over, beautiful white feathers brightly stained with crimson.

And Oliver Tay swung back his horse and tried a flying shot at the rabbit, which has now covered half the distance to freedom. The bullet cast a shower of dust into the air and dimmed the target for the fifth bullet, which also missed completely. Not a yard away, now, lies freedom for that jack rabbit, which means the white stallion for Martinez.

No, head high, smiling, calm, at ease, Oliver Tay has fired again; and the rabbit rises into the air and, spinning head over heels, strikes the bar of the gate and flops heavily back into the rodeo ground.

Flinder goes to the gringo!

CHAPTER X.

THE AWARD.

IF Oliver Tay had congratulated Martinez and wished him the best of all sportsman's chances before the contest, Martinez now had no such return of courtesy to his successful rival at the conclusion of the fray. He went to the judges to protest. With three bullets he had done his work. It had cost Oliver Tay six.

The judges were deaf. "Your rabbit still lives. Perhaps it will not die at all!" they told him. Flinder was not for him. It was for the giant.

A giant for a giant, in fact! See him now as they lead him in, two men conducting him. Half the time they are dangling in the air, as he rears and prances in acknowledgment of the uproar which greets his majesty. And the other half of the time they are tugging and straining vainly at the lead ropes to urge him forward. He goes forward as he pleases. He stops when he pleases, and sometimes turns a little and pricks his ears toward the distant horizon, as though asking himself if it would not be very much worth his while, after all, to dash these miserable, clinging humans to the ground and streak away over the edge of the sky line to eternal freedom? But he had absorbed enough lessons to make him realize that there was more in man than met the eye.

Don Andrea, paying over the money which he had lost with a good grace, murmured, "But now, Diego, will you bet again?"

"I think I shall," said Venustiano. "What is it this time?"

"Flinder will be entered in the race, will he not?"

"If there is an ounce of spirit in his new owner, Flinder will be entered!"

For, as the very last act of the rodeo, on a course laid out all around the rodeo grounds, there was to be a two-mile horse race.

"I think he will be entered, well enough," nodded Rulliano. "And I will wager another thousand, Don Diego, that my thoroughbred beats him."

"Perhaps, for your horse is a racer. And you will be having a lightweight rider against the bulk of this Oliver Tay. But, at the same time, I tell you that I am going to lay the bet, and without asking odds from you. Because I think that on this day Oliver Tay will take a great deal of beating."

"I take you, then, for another thousand. See the crowd! They are mad over this white horse. I'm a little mad over him myself, Diego. There was never such another creature in the history of the world."

"See him dance and scorn them, even if they are his masters!"

"How could this Oliver Tay manage him for a race?"

"He will find a way, and my bet stands. Now he comes closer to his horse. Look, Andrea, are they not matched? Are they not of the same soul stuff?"

For, as the crowd poured out from the stands and surrounded the horse, at a distance respectful to his heels, Oliver Tay came striding through them, looking as much larger and as much more magnificent than the other men in that assemblage as Flinder looked like an ideal horse when compared with the other mounts of that day.

To the place where Marian Barge stood the stallion was led; and there he paused, shaking his head at the noise of shouting all around him. Up to his head came Oliver Tay; and, taking the splendid Mexican sombrero from his head, he raised his face to the girl who stood above him, giving him with a gesture, in the name of Don Diego, this splendid prize. But what she said, if she tried to speak, could not be heard. For there was a veritable din around them.

Oliver Tay, replacing his hat on his

head, touched the pommel with his hand; and, vaulting lightly into the saddle, he rode off from the field toward the course for the race which was to test what horse and rider could perform together after so brief an acquaintance. A lane was made for him; and Flinder went dancing through it, sometimes rearing on his hind legs and walking and sometimes trying to lunge away, but held by a powerful curb and a mighty hand that bowed his head down against his broad breast and held him in check.

The whole interest of the crowd was in this magnificent horse and his no-less-magnificent rider. There was only one little counter-whirlpool of excitement, observed only by a few; for, as Don Diego left his place and went toward Marian Barge he saw that her face had lost all color. It had become, as Federigo had described it a little time before, as white as translucent stone; and, at the sight of Don Diego, she dropped her head and sank to the floor. He reached her with a leap; she had fainted away.

"It is the sun. She has been standing too long under that hot sun, with so much to do—poor child!" So said the ladies who tended her with much sympathy.

Don Diego waited only to make sure that she was not seriously ill but that she was recovering instantly from a fainting spell. Federigo had come to him, and he drew that sharp-eyed spy to one side. "Now tell me, Federigo, what you noticed, if anything, that could have caused this thing?"

"That made the señorita faint?"

"What else could I mean?"

"There was no chance to hear what she tried to say, and Señor Tay made no attempt to speak back to her because there was a wave of shouting all over the field."

"Very well. But you have eyes, Federigo. Did you see anything?"

"A man's eyes may deceive him, señor——"

"I am not asking you for absolute facts, fool. Even a chance guess would be welcome to me now, I tell you!"

"Then I may say what I thought I saw. Which was that, when Señor Tay came toward her, the señorita stood up and then sat down again quickly, as though she had grown suddenly weak. I thought that she would faint then, instead of later. However, a bit of color suddenly came back into her face. She stepped forward quite boldly again. And at that time, as Señor Tay came before her, it seemed to me that her whole appearance changed, señor, and she looked down at him with a sort of joy."

"Wait!" interrupted his master. "Do you understand, Federigo? If you are wrong in this, you had better never have had a tongue to speak at all."

"Señor, I think that I understand. But what I saw with my own eyes I may believe. What was in the mind of the lady I cannot tell, but I know that for an instant she seemed happy. And then——"

"And Don Oliver, on the ground beneath her—what of him?"

"I was to watch the lady, señor, and not other people. Besides, when I looked at him, just then, he was surrounded by a whirl of the people; and I only saw the golden flashing of his hair as he turned toward the stallion."

"Then tell me, Federigo," said the rich man, "what you can make out of all that you have overheard and overlooked?"

"Señor," said the spy, trembling, "I had rather be the eye and the ear of Señor Venustiano; I do not wish to try to be his brain, also!"

"Nevertheless," exclaimed Don Diego, "you have some thought! I tell you, Federigo, there is no other man in the world to whom I dare to open my mind at the present moment, and there-

fore I shall be glad to have your opinion freely. Speak out to me!"

Poor Federigo looked rather wildly about him; but then he said desperately, "It seems to me, Señor Venustiano, that all I have seen points in one direction."

"So it seems to me, also," said his master. "Let us see if I agree with you."

"In the first place, I hear it said that 'he' is to be here. And shortly afterward we see the man with the golden hair in the field. And then another messenger comes and says that he will soon come to her; and a third arrives asking when he may come; and she answers that he is to come at midnight. And, after that, the man with the golden hair himself arrives before her; and I see her start up, and her color change twice, and a sort of joy come into her eyes."

He paused, looking curiously into the face of Don Diego, but the latter maintained his nerve with a great effort and bowed his head a little. "And then, Federigo?" he pressed.

"And then, as Oliver Tay turns away from her, she falls in a faint, señor."

"Ah!" groaned Venustiano, his face suffused with sweat and his skin turning gray.

"So that I should say, señor, that Oliver Tay is the man who will be expected by the señorita at midnight this same night."

Having delivered this opinion, he bowed and remained with his eyes fixed on the ground. In the meantime, the two were left totally alone, for there was a great bustle all around them as the people hurried away toward the race grounds to get the best posts of observation.

At last the master said: "Stay by me, Federigo. Before long I shall have other work for you to do, connected with this same matter, I'm afraid. Be constantly near me, and—one thing more: Those fellows, Oñate and Martinez—what do you know of them?"

"I know very little, señor, except that——"

"Tush, Federigo, you have at least heard a rumor about every human being in the universe. Tell me what you know."

"Only that it is said that they shoot too well to be entirely honest!"

"I thought as much. I want you to go to them. Tell them that I was pleased to see such fine work with rifles and revolvers even by men who were beaten—by luck. And let them have something to retain them—two or three hundred pesos apiece, or more if you think it necessary. Understand, Federigo, before the end of this day they must be my men."

CHAPTER XI.

MURDER!

PREFERABLY, Federigo was one who would neither think nor know. He would simply observe and report. However, he had by chance been thrust so deep into the confidence of his master on this day that he could not help guessing a single step ahead and arriving at a strange conclusion. There would be a use for Martinez and for Oñate, both. Was it so very difficult to imagine, therefore, what use Don Diego might be able to make of two expert fighters and wild men—a use that very day, perhaps, say at about midnight.

Now, Don Diego turned his back for a moment upon the dark ideas which had thronged up into his mind. In the first place, there was much else for him to do. The happy faces of his guests showed him that even the elect of that wild mountain land had enjoyed themselves to the uttermost through the three days of the festival, and he must mix with them. Then he had to speak again to Marian Barge and to ask her

if she would not retire and rest. Her eyes were already wandering far before her toward the place where the riders for the race were gathering. No, she would not go. She felt well. She felt very well. It was only a passing dizziness which had troubled her. And now she would stay, of course, to see how the race might turn out.

Don Diego heard her with a sinking heart. It might be that he was utterly wrong in all that he surmised, but he felt that he could not be. And he had the confirmation of Federigo's suspicions to fortify his own. Two proofs, however small, are a thousand times more powerful than one. And he was filled with wonder, too. He had looked upon this girl as the quietest and gentlest soul in the world, but now he could suspect that there was a great deal of force in her, also, and a silent and steady enthusiasm such as he himself had never dreamed of. He knew the meaning of that far-off, eager look, he thought.

"Listen to me, Federigo," he said to his spy, as they hurried toward the observation platform which had been prepared for the elite of the spectators. "Young Guillermo Estaban has been in Siddon Flat—that is the young fellow who recently joined my guard. Go to Estaban hastily. Ask him if he knew the name of the man who was reported to have been in love with the señorita a year ago—the man who disappeared into the mountains."

And he added to himself, as Federigo hurried off: "What a dolt I was not to learn every detail of that affair before I left the town! Before I took a step toward her!"

Such were the thoughts of Don Diego as he came to the high stand from which he was to watch the race; but, the moment that he reached that place, his reflections were scattered like dust before the breath of a strong wind, such was the excitement around him. Everywhere bets were being placed on the various horses. For that race the finest horseflesh in the mountains had been entered—imported stock from England and France or direct descendants of that racing blood, though most were perhaps a little high in flesh to show their utmost speed, and all were inclined to look something more like picture horses than the racing machines which they could have been made. However, there was a good half dozen of them entered, because a five-thousand-peso stake was eminently worth running for in any country, and because, also, there was an excellent opportunity of making even more money by betting.

And every man who had a thoroughbred in that race was smiling up his sleeve at the idea that any other horse in that section of the world could possibly live with his own speedster for as much as a furlong of running. Not that there were only imported horses. There was the great Flinder, of course. And yet he was not the favorite, for though it was agreed that in a day's chase through the mountains he could have run any of those finely drawn horses to the ground, still a two-mile sprint was a different matter. Besides, he was carrying a heavy burden. Knowing men of money consistently bet against him at any odds. But as for the rank and file, they all placed their coin, without exception, upon the white stallion.

Flinder, Flinder was their only thought. And, as he stood yonder at the starting post, dancing on his toes, with the sun flashing and shimmering along his flanks, he seemed thoroughly capable of living up to their fine opinion of him.

As for the native-bred and half-blood horses, they had been scratched the instant it was known that Flinder was to be entered. One could not quite be sure. Perhaps on the rather soft

and cuppy going on that race course, over a full two miles, endurance such as a cow pony possesses might have worn down the thoroughbreds. But there was no longer any such question now that Flinder was entered. He had the endurance of an express train; he would run as far as an eagle would fly, it was felt.

There was only a single doubt about the winner of that race in the minds of the rank and file. Would the new rider be able to make Flinder run? That doubt, too, was presently banished. For they could see Flinder, now, turning his head and looking at his rider with pricked ears, and turning his head still farther, and sniffing the hand which the giant held out to him.

And what a group for stone that horse and rider made! To see Oliver Tay on foot, one wondered where the horse would be found to carry him with any ease. But here was Flinder, who made even Oliver Tay look slender and medium in weight. And he stretched forth his neck and flaunted his tail and sent his neigh ringing over the heads of the crowd.

"Very beautiful! Very beautiful!" said one gay lady beside Don Diego. "But he will never win over those thoroughbreds. A wolf may be a grand animal, but it can't outfoot a greyhound, you know!"

"Nevertheless," said Don Diego, "I am betting on the white stallion. Will you tell your husband that?"

It happened that this same family was not altogether affluent. They could well use a few thousand of the silver pesos which Diego Venustiano tore from the earth. And so the gentleman came in haste. Would Don Diego really bet Flinder against the field? Flinder's chances preferred to those of all the others?

"Write the bet any way you care to," said Don Diego. "I'll take it, and in any amount."

For his heart was swelling in him with grief and indignation at the very thought of the troubles which might be lying ahead of him with Marian Barge, and he was anxious to find some sort of diversion, if only for a moment in placing bets on a horse race! If that was diversion for him, he found it in plenty in the following moments. Everywhere on the flat beneath the platform the crowd was offering money on Flinder, always on Flinder, and with no takers. But when it became known among the people of money that their host was actually betting on the white stallion against the entire field—there was an incredulous gasp and then a laugh of joy.

For they had not altered much from their ancestors, the conquistadors, in one respect; that is to say, they loved gold as much as did those high adventurers of an earlier century, who had crossed the ocean with their swords to find it. And now their descendants came hungrily to Don Diego. Had he really expressed a desire to bet the white horse against all and every one of the other horses on the field? Did he mean it as a jest, or would he be in earnest?

He stood up and laughed at them almost joyfully. "Gentlemen, gentlemen!" said Diego Venustiano. "You may write out the sums of your bets and place them in my hand. I shall cover them all. Signal for the race to be postponed for a moment. Now take your time and think over the matter and decide how good you feel your judgment to be, and how much you are willing to risk on it in hard cash."

They came in a swift drove. Only now and again one held back for an instant. "Nothing has ever been found that could keep up with Flinder in the open country—mountains or plains!" some objected.

But the more confident spirits appealed freely to reason; for those other

tests were not tests at all, they said. No saddle had gripped the loins of the stallion, and the burden of no giant had weighted his stirrups. He had run free, unbridled, happy as an eagle on the wing. But now he was to be forced to submit to another's will—the will of a stranger, at that! And, furthermore, he was to be herded along with other horses. And, above all, he was to be forced to compete against the pride of the race track—trained sprinters! Over hill and dale, rough and smooth, no doubt he could kill off these specialists in speed. But in such a short race——

And, besides, let any one look at the lines of him! Beautiful, to be sure, but not light and long enough in the leg to compete against these greyhounds! So said the wise, and so the timid took their judgment and went gayly to bet against Flinder and Don Diego—bet by many thousands at a time.

These bets were laid and finished when Venustiano saw the face of Federigo near by, and found that face so dark with gloom that it renewed the chill that had seized the heart of the rich man earlier in the day. He beckoned his servant to him. "Now, Federigo, you have made the inquiry?" he asked.

"I have made it," said Federigo. "It will not please you, señor."

"Speak, speak!"

"I was told that every person north of the Rio Grande knew that Marian Barge had been promised in marriage to Oliver Tay!"

Don Diego closed his eyes for a long moment.

When he opened them some one was calling, "May the signal be given for the start, Señor Venustiano?"

"Begin!" gasped Don Diego. And then he leaned toward Federigo. "You have Martinez and Oñate also?"

"In the hollow of my hand!" said Federigo, with a little shudder, as though he were not altogether pleased by the sense of possession when it had to do with such fellows as that hardy pair.

"And they are ready?"

"For anything, señor!"

"That is well," said Venustiano. "I think that you will have to speak to them again, however. I think that you had better prepare them for the work which they will surely have to do."

"Señor, we still may be mistaken."

"Very well, but in the meantime we must be forearmed. Go to them at once. Find them, and ask them what would be in their minds if they knew that the man they were to face at midnight were none other than that same terrible Oliver Tay. Ask them, and if their courage fails at the thought, tell them that they may have more help."

"I shall, señor."

"But my mind is made up. Do you understand, Federigo? It is not that I dream any harm may come, but Cæsar's wife must be above suspicion. Well, you would not understand that. However, this is what you must tell them: Oliver Tay shall die before the morning dawns. He shall die promptly at midnight."

The nostrils of Federigo expanded and contracted. "He is dead!" said the spy. "And their rewards?"

"Each shall be made rich. But twice as much shall go to the one who puts the first bullet through the heart of Oliver Tay. Go quickly!"

And at that moment there was a roar which was like a deep groan, coming from every throat in the audience.

CHAPTER XII.

THE RACE.

IT was a wild glance that Venustiano cast around him, for it almost seemed as though the multitude had spied upon his thoughts and given them this groan for a token of their opinion

of his plotting. But, an instant later, he brought his wits back from their agony to the earth and knew that this shout was merely the spontaneous cry which always rises when the racers are off from the start. And then another cry of agony came from all the crowd around the fences.

"Flinder! Flinder!"

For the darling of the crowd, the wild horse, the invincible Flinder, seemed to have been left at the post. Or could it be he had started so slowly, compared with the watch-spring uncoiling of the others, that he seemed to be left ridiculously behind them, though he was doing his best?

At any rate, the important fact was that half a dozen pairs of heels were flashing rhythmically down the soft track; and, in their wake, half obscured by the dense dust cloud which they raised, but still with the sun striking a silver shimmer from his flanks now and again, came the great stallion.

"A picture horse, you see, but not able to live against a real racer," said Don Andrea to his host, with just a touch of the patron.

But Don Diego answered: "If he loses this race, there are others still for him and for his master. More important races than this——"

"What do you mean by that, Diego?"

"Nothing at all, or else it was a mere whim that crossed my mind! However, are they still gaining on Flinder?"

"Of course. They have opened such a wide gap, however, that you can't see them increase it so rapidly. He is last. Oliver Tay might as well rein him in and ride back the other way. It is the shortest cut to the grand stand."

Andrea Rulliano laughed. He could not help a little mirth. For, on the one hand, he was to win a very handsome and pleasant stake by the defeat of Flinder, and so were all of the other gentlemen and ladies around him; and, if it happened that Don Diego had to pay out these sums, why, what did it matter? He was so vastly wealthy that even such a loss would be nothing to him, and it might serve the good end of teaching him that his opinion was best kept to mining and mining matters. Horseflesh was a flight beyond his ken.

Don Diego paid no heed to the laughter or to the shining faces in that dense little crowd. Neither did he listen to the shouts of wonder and despair that rose still from the peons and cattlemen around the track. What was important to him was one face, and that was the face of Marian Barge, standing close to the edge of the platform. He saw that her hands were clasped at her breast, and her face strained, and her lips parted with the most intense excitement. Certainly he would never have dreamed that for the sake of a mere horse race this woman of stone could show so much emotion. He worked his way quickly and stood directly behind her. She was trembling violently.

Don Diego, resting his hand against a pillar that supported the sun screen above the stand, felt a dark mist whirl across his eyes. For this seemed to him a more convincing proof than anything that sharp-eyed Federigo had seen or heard. Certainly it was not the running of the horse that made her tremble, but it was the man who was riding in that race that mattered to her.

He stared out across the field, above the heads of his laughing, shouting companions, and across the silent, stiff-standing multitude, and saw the race—the great stallion running far, far to the rear, hopeless number of strides away, and the thoroughbreds bunched in the lead. No, one of them was taking the lead now—a clean-cut young mare, Esmeralda, a bright bay, flashing like a fine jewel in the sun as she bounded through the soft, sandy going. For it was hardly to be called a track.

It was merely a fenced-in course to be used this once; and the hoofs sunk deep, deep, at every stride.

No wonder that Flinder was anchored, considering his weight and the mighty burden on his back. And yet, was he really anchored? They no longer seemed to float farther ahead of him. And Don Diego, training his glass on horse and rider, saw Oliver Tay sitting easily in the saddle, his weight thrown well forward and the wind of the gallop blowing out his flashing hair. And the stride of the stallion seemed wonderfully light and free. Yes, watching Flinder at his work, and the glimmering of the sun on his muscles, one could not help feeling that that magnificent machine would conquer in the end.

He swept his glass to the thoroughbreds. They, also, ran wonderfully lightly; and yet it seemed to Venustiano that they lacked something of the huge stride of the stallion, something of the wonderful buoyancy of his gallop. He was no longer losing ground. A mile of the distance had been passed. The second turn was rounded, and surely now the white monster was winging his way faster than the rest. They swept nearer. They straightened toward the finish.

And now one could see the effect of distance and soft going. Beautiful Esmeralda was done. Her head was jerking up with each stride; and she was falling back, back. A brown gelding had the lead now; and a chestnut stallion was creeping up on his flank.

Perhaps the rider on Esmeralda realized that all was over, so far as his mount was concerned, and stopped urging her; but, at any rate, back she went and trailed behind the rearmost of the leaders. And then a white streak went past her, gaining almost two yards for every one she was covering. That was Flinder, coming mightily up from the rear.

And the men who watched around the fences suddenly came to life, shrieking his name, "Flinder! Flinder!" as though they felt that the power of their voices could, in some way, add speed to the racing horse.

Esmeralda was breathing dust; and still, with enormous strides, Flinder gained upon the leaders. There was another gone, a black horse on whom the going had told. Back he went, and now Flinder was past him, also, and still making toward the leaders.

Upon the ground there was pandemonium. Hats were flung wildly into the air, and hands brandished, and pistols discharged in a deafening tumult. But upon the stand there had fallen a sudden silence, so that Don Diego, leaning far forward, was able to hear Marian Barge whispering softly, over and over, "Oliver, Oliver, ride!"

It thrust a knife of pain into the very heart of Don Diego. He straightened and pressed the glass to his eyes again. There was no doubt now that the white stallion had a fighting chance. In three furlongs he would undoubtedly win, at this rate of running, but there was hardly that left to him—hardly half of it; and the chestnut stallion was showing wonderful strength. He was working free from the brown. Now he was in the clear running, right on the rail, stretched out straight as a string from head to tail, with a lightweight jockey in the saddle, swaying in rhythm with the stride of his mount.

Oliver Tay was working, too. Not with heel or whip, but leaning far forward to cut the wind with his wide shoulders; and through the glass, now, Don Diego could see the lips of the giant moving. He was calling on Flinder, and the stallion was answering with unbelievable power. Flinder reached the tangled knot of the three thoroughbreds who worked behind the leader. He went by them like a fast yacht past a slow freighter. He was not slacken-

ing for all the softness of the going, and it seemed as though the work had merely limbered and freshened his might. His ears pricked, and his nostrils spread until Don Diego could see the red lining of them; and still he seemed to gather speed, with his tail swept behind him and his mane blowing up into the intent face of Oliver Tay.

There was not a hundred yards left to the race, and still the chestnut was a good two lengths away, running honestly, very tired but never faltering. Then Oliver Tay loosened the tight reins which held the white horse, and in an instant it was over. It seemed to Don Diego as though the beat of invisible wings must have buoyed the stallion in his stride. He seemed to reach the saddle of the chestnut in one stride, and in another he was well-nigh a whole length in the lead and past the winning post.

The screech of the peons and the cattlemen roared in the ears of Venustiano; but more than that was the shrill cry of Marian Barge, half stifled in the uproar, "Oliver, Oliver, Oliver!"

And though Don Diego was richer by tens of thousands of dollars for the victory of the white horse, yet he felt that moment that he had become infinitely poorer. And Marian Barge, as though she had suddenly recollected herself, turned her head hastily, and found the burning eyes of Venustiano fixed upon her. She winced a little and smiled at him a very wan smile.

He decided that he would meet the issue firmly and more than halfway. "I know that Oliver Tay is an old friend of yours," he said. "Of course you are glad to see him win!" That was surely opening enough, he thought, if she had anything to say to him; and he was not mistaken.

For she said faintly, "I think I shall have to speak to you—at once, Diego!"

It seemed the end of the world to Venustiano. But now he had to turn away among his guests and be the smiling host to them, never knowing what that conversation with the girl might unfold.

CHAPTER XIII.

DON DIEGO'S PLANS.

THEY could not have that talk at once, of course. And it was long hours before, at last, the entire party had been gathered together at the Casa Venustiano in the midst of the gardens that crowned the mountain. They were to spend the entire night there. A hundred guests—but there was room for them all! And at the banquet that night they were to learn that Marian Barge had been betrothed to Don Diego. And they could guess, then, that all of this festival had been in her honor who had given the prizes away.

Such were the plans of Diego Venustiano, but his face was very dark as he found, at last, his chance to speak with Marian alone. For it seemed to him that he had been living in a dream, and that his house itself was only part of a bubble which had been blown up, and which would vanish and leave him nothing but misery.

They were in the library. One vast window filled each end of the huge, vaulted room. There was a fireplace at one side into which even Oliver Tay could have stepped and stood upright, his lofty sombrero upon his head. And now, as the windows were thrown open, the soft, warm air of the evening blew gently in, purified with the fragrance of the garden. And with it came drifts and murmurs of voices, in humming conversation, and tinkling laughter of women.

They had wandered everywhere. They had drowned Venustiano with congratulations for his princely residence a thousand times repeated. And now an air of expectation was tingling through the house, while the great ban-

queting hall stirred with busy noise, and through the long windows a golden shadow of light fell out into the garden. All was happiness—except for Venustiano.

Marian stood beside the table with a hand on it. And in his misery he took note of the smallest details—the dazzling brightness of that hand against the dark wood, and how her hair was coiled at the base of her neck, and the wideness of her frightened eyes, and how the brilliant Spanish shawl seemed to be slipping from one shoulder.

"Now, my dear," said Venustiano, forcing himself into a tone paternally kind and a little gay, "what is troubling you?"

"So far," she said, "you have told no one—except Señor Rulliano and the señora, I suppose?"

"No one," he answered. "That is for to-night."

"I don't wish you to think," said she in a small, choked voice, "that I am wishing to dodge my promise to you. But I'm afraid of the future, and that's why I want to talk with you. I want to tell you that Oliver Tay—if you haven't known it already—is the man I was to marry!"

He was glad that he had had that news beforehand. It enabled him to merely nod, now, and wait for her to continue.

"And," she went on, "I thought, after a year of waiting for him and little word or none from him, that I no longer cared—a great deal. But when I saw him to-day I found that I was mistaken."

He felt the blow coming, and he stepped bravely forward to meet its shock. "You mean," said Don Diego, "that when you saw him come dashing onto the field, with his golden hair blowing over his shoulders, you thought that you still loved him?"

"Yes!"

"And he?" asked Venustiano.

"I don't know," said she. "But he sent me word that he wanted to see me. And——" She paused.

"Well?" he asked gently, seeing that she was very pale.

"I sent word for him to come at midnight. I intended to see him privately and not to let you know. But now I think that is not honest. And, besides, I am afraid!"

"Of what?" he asked.

"Afraid of myself. Because I am promised to you. And because I want to keep that promise. But if I see and talk with him I don't know what might happen."

He waited.

"And I think," she continued faintly, "that when he comes you had better arrange to send him away again. You could say that I am not very well."

He led her to a chair in front of the southern window. Through it, the eye wandered across the garden and through the trees which fringed the plateau—they had been transplanted from the valley beneath at a frightful cost of labor, every one—they had glimpses of the distant mountains through the night, with the loftier peaks dimly crowned with white.

"Now," said Diego Venustiano, "there are two things which I can do. The first is to say: 'Take this old lover of yours. Marry him. I shall see that you are well provided for.' And perhaps that would seem the generous thing to do. But, on the other hand, if I did that, I should wonder what would become of you and your husband. Money can't make happiness. I see that more and more clearly. And I doubt if money could tame him.

"My reason is that even you, Marian, have not been able to keep him true to himself and to you. He has wandered away. He has joined himself to the most famous band of outlaws in Mexico. And though he might come and talk of love to you, to-night, would

it be because he really loved you, or rather simply because it would be a grand adventure to win you away from me and the Casa Venustiano? So, thinking of this, I feel that I have a right and a duty to be selfish and keep you to your promise to me, and tell you, my dear, that you must stay with me, and that you are quite right not to see this old lover. Will you blame me for that?"

She drew a soft breath. And then she said: "No, I haven't even thought of breaking my promise. Only——" She paused again, and then added with a sudden passion: "Only, make sure that I don't see him again. Keep him away from me. And, once we are married, I know that I shall be true to you. Will you do what I ask?"

Don Diego stood up from his chair and leaned a little over her, from behind, so that she could not see the savage triumph which was in his face. "He shall never see you again!" he promised solemnly. "That is finished!"

He heard a catch in her throat. He knew that tears would be apt to come very soon; and he also knew that a woman never forgives a man for standing by after he has given her cause to weep. So he escorted her briskly to her room. And he only said at the door: "I am going to make you happy. You may depend on that. Why, Marian, I have done nothing but hard things all the days of my life, and I'm not afraid of this one. I have one new idea, however. To-night, I am not going to announce our engagement merely. I'm going to announce our marriage, and to-morrow Father Ricardo shall marry us in the church. Do you agree?"

She could not speak to him. She merely made a mute little gesture of assent, and hurried on into her room.

But Don Diego went back, a happy man. He had laid his ground well, he felt. And if Oliver Tay died that night, with bullets through his heart, Marian could never blame the master of the house.

Federigo had the pair waiting for him. He went straight to see them. Seen at close hand, they did not appear less formidable. Martinez was an old hunter, with a bit of gray about his temples and a face as hard as iron. Oñate was younger, but in his dark eyes there was the patience and the ferocity of a great cat. They were mountain made, both of these fellows. The stamp of the wilderness was upon them. Surely they were the proper tools to kill with; for, if one of them fell in the work, the world would feel no loss. It would merely have one less incipient murderer among its ranks of men.

"Now, my friends," said Diego Venustiano, "Federigo has talked with you and let you know what is expected?"

"We know," said Martinez. And Oñate nodded.

"I could have taken a dozen men for the work," said Don Diego; "but I had rather use two good workers than a dozen bunglers. Besides, it makes the reward greater. What has Federigo paid you?"

"Five hundred pesos to each."

"I have with me a thousand more for each of you. And that is only a beginning. There will be more, hereafter. Tell me this—have you any doubt about your ability to handle the big man?"

Martinez murmured, "It is only the small wolf that can dodge the bullet, señor!"

As for young Oñate, he merely smiled, and his dark eyes glistened like the eyes of a hunting cat.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN EXTRA HORSE.

WHEN Oliver Tay rode up Venustiano Valley, you may be sure that he could not have moved at all, except with a crowd, had it not been for the

darkness of the night. And, even so, he had had to maneuver a good deal before he could break away from his admirers. He had to leave first, and then make a swift detour and come stealing back into the barn where the white stallion was kept.

He saw the glimmering figure ahead of him, in a stall, and went straight for it, with his saddle over his arm. Not the gold-and-silver-mounted saddle which had been with the horse when it was won, but another and plainer one some vital pounds lighter; and before the morning there might be need of every pound saved that Oliver Tay could manage.

A shadow rose in the darkness before him with a wonderful suddenness, and a voice hissed in Spanish, "Who goes?" and the shimmer of a naked knife was at the breast of Oliver Tay.

"Yellow Wolf!" he exclaimed, starting back. "You are like a ghost, after the sun goes down. I forgot that you were here, and I have nearly had eight inches of steel in my heart as a result."

The Comanche laughed softly in the darkness. "All hunting is not done under the sun," said he. "I did not know you, brother, because I have not the eyes of a cat."

They went together to the stall.

"Beware!" murmured the Indian. "He is more a tiger than a horse, and if you go suddenly in to him——"

"We have known each other only half a day," said Oliver calmly; "and, if we are not friends now, he will be of no use to me to-night!"

He stepped boldly into the stall, running his hand down the back of the great white horse until he came to the head of Flinder. And that monarch of the mountains snuffed the coat of his new master and then shook his head and stamped.

"He knows you!" murmured Yellow Wolf incredulously. "A good horse has more wits than most men. Do you ride now?"

"First, we must daub him over with this stain, brother. It is a pity to tarnish the silver of Flinder, but we must do it. Otherwise he will shine in this valley like a bright star, and the work that we have to do needs secrecy!"

"Good!" said the Indian, and without another word he fell to work industriously on one side of the stallion while his white friend worked on the other, and soon the shining pelt of the white horse was smudged over as with soot.

"This stain will be dry in five minutes, I think," said Oliver Tay. "Has Capiño been here?"

"He has been here."

"And what message did he leave for me?"

"That he and the others will be waiting for you in the poplar grove at the farther side of the lake."

"They will not fail me, then!" murmured Oliver joyfully. "And you are with me, Yellow Wolf. By Heaven, all men are true to me! And now, if I am true to myself, I shall do a bit of work that will be remembered in one house in this valley." And he looked up through the door of the barn and toward the shining lights that gleamed from the house of Venustiano, on the mountain.

"He has his gold and his silver, and his servants and his flunkies, and his house and his mines and his cattle ranges; and against all of that I balance my handful of friends, Yellow Wolf, and we shall see who is the stronger. A friend is the finest wealth and the most useful. Tell me, amigo, have I ever offered you money?"

"You have never offered it," said Yellow Wolf.

"And is there anything money will buy from you which I cannot have for the asking?"

"Nothing," said the Comanche simply.

"I believe it," said the giant. "And with four hearts like yours to fight for me, Yellow Wolf, I think that I could conquer the world. That stain is dry, by this time. We'll saddle him."

The saddle was accordingly put on the back of the stallion. They led the monster out through the back entrance of the stable into the corral, surrounded as it was by a tall fence.

"I shall take down the top bar," offered Yellow Wolf.

But the giant answered: "If he will not jump a little fence like this, he is not the horse for me. Where is your own pony?"

"Here," said the Comanche.

He whistled, and at once a horse showed beyond the bars and whimpered with a half-choked neigh for its master.

"He comes to you like a dog to its owner!" said Oliver Tay, very well pleased at the sight of this.

"That is true," said Yellow Wolf. "For you have taught me to make a friend of my horse, rather than a slave. He will run farther and faster and truer now than spur and whip could ever make him before."

"We are ready, then. Come, Flinder. We are over this fence——"

The great horse lurched at a stride into what seemed to the Indian full speed for a racing horse; and, with a bound, he hurled himself high into the air. To Yellow Wolf, overawed, it seemed that half the stars of the heavens above were blotted out by the flying silhouette of this magnificent pair. And then there stood the stallion beyond the bars.

"He didn't flick a bar with his heels," said Oliver Tay, laughing in exultation. "He has wings hitched to these feet of his. We're away, Yellow Wolf!"

They swerved around the corner of the barn. And in a moment they were picking their way down a narrow street of the village which Venustiano had built here.

"Faugh!" grunted the Comanche. "See them snorting and rolling in the dirt like pigs. Shall we not stop, brother, and take away a scalp or two that will never be missed by the townsmen in the morning?"

"Take scalps? Take scalps?" said Oliver Tay, too accustomed to his companion to be shocked by this suggestion. "Do you forget that this is the country of Venustiano?"

"No," sighed the Indian. "I remember! Lead me, brother. I have no thoughts, except those which you give to me."

And they whirled away from the edge of the town and made for the far-off shimmer of the waters of the lake, whose still surface took all the bright faces of the stars as clearly as though they were sunk here in the depths of another heaven. They reached the poplar grove beside Lake Venustiano; and, in the steep, dark shadow that lay between the edge of the trees and the lake itself, they could see three horses and three riders. Yellow Wolf hooted, like an owl that sends its soft, half-muffled cry along the ground as it hunts for prey in the twilight; and instantly the three men in the shadow came to life. They poured out on their horses and joined the pair.

"Carpio! Antonio! Capiño!" called Oliver Tay. "If a single one of you were missing I should have had to give up this work that I have in mind for to-night. But you are here; and I think before morning you will have made me the happiest man in the world!"

"So? So?" said Carpio Vega, shaking his wise head. "Then is there to be a woman in it?"

"First," said Oliver Tay, "I thank you for giving me this night, when you could have been taking in a little harvest among the drunken fools of the village."

"I have found a few odd moments," said Capiño with satisfaction. "I have

not wasted the entire evening." And in his hand he raised a little necklace that sparkled red and faint in the starlight.

"Do not thank us, brother," said Vega. "What you wish, we wish. When we work for you, we serve ourselves. We owe you our blood. Do you think that we shall stop, then, and ask for thanks. No—speak clearly! We have done what you asked us to do. We have our horses here. They are all in good trim. We have not touched beer or wine, even, since dinner time. Our guns are looked to. We have enough food and provisions to last us for a month's ride—as we travel!"

"Bless you, Carpio! You have forgotten nothing. You have even remembered the extra horse, then?"

"That, first of all. Look at her! She is a sound mare, Oliver. I got her from a man who would not sell her for any price. But he would gamble for her. And I have not forgotten how to roll dice and make them answer me! So I took her away and left him crying. She is not a heavyweight, but you said that the extra horse would not have a great burden to carry. And as for speed and wind and gentleness, she is a perfect thing."

"She has the head and the eye, and the proper span between them," said Oliver Tay. "And now, friends, this is the direction in which we are riding." He raised his arm and pointed.

Vega and Morales were silent; but little Capiño broke out with a moan: "The Casa Venustiano! Diablo, amigos, I knew that he would go mad one of these fine nights! I knew that! And now we are to fly up the face of a mountain to rob the devil himself."

"Be quiet, Capiño," said Vega. "You need not go with us, if you are afraid."

This taunt brought a groan from the little man and then silenced him, though he writhed with a desire to protest.

"Very well," said Carpio Vega. "We are with you up the cliff, if you wish. Are you to blow open the treasury of Venustiano to-night?"

"No, Carpio. To-night, at his banquet, Don Diego has announced to his guests that to-morrow he will marry Marian Barge. But the fool has lied. She will never see the morning rising over that house. The extra horse is for her, Carpio!"

CHAPTER XV.

SPIES.

THEY traveled in single file, with Oliver Tay leading; and then, at a little distance behind him, came the three, closely grouped, Capiño and dark Antonio Morales and that calm hero, Carpio Vega. They led the extra horse with them. And far to the rear skulked Yellow Wolf on his little pony.

Half the time he was out of sight; and Capiño, who suspected everybody and everything in this wide world except the man of his worship—Oliver Tay—rode hastily up to that leader to communicate his latest ugly thought. "The Indian is sneaking back to the rear, and before long he will drop away and scoot off to send in a warning that will cause us all to die before another hour is out, Oliver!" said the sneak thief and knife fighter.

"Listen to me, Capiño," said the good-natured giant. "Whatever else you may do, don't waste your time trying to understand Yellow Wolf. I have lived close to him for a long time, but even I can't make him out. Only I know that I would trust him a little better than I would trust myself. Go back to Carpio. He will tell you that we don't have to fear from Yellow Wolf."

"Listen!" broke in Capiño.

Across the night came the mournful, booming call of the owl. And again it came.

"It is Yellow Wolf," cried Capiño,

"calling us back into some sort of ambuscade. Oliver, you must not go!"

"Hush, you fool!" snapped Oliver angrily; and he brushed away the hand which Capiño stretched out toward him. "Do you think that I shall stay here when I hear such a signal? There may be danger for Yellow Wolf; and I have sworn to stand by him, as he by me."

Flinder bore Oliver back like a flying comet. Before Vega and Morales could well turn about the heads of their horses to investigate the call of the owl, which was their prearranged signal, Oliver Tay was shooting past them and plunging into the thicket from which they had just issued. He came abruptly upon a little clearing, and there reined in his horse barely in time to keep from trampling upon a singular group, which consisted of two men lying flat on their backs, with their arms thrown out crosswise, while above them crouched the Indian, a pistol pressed against the back of one and his knife point tickling the throat of the other.

"I would have killed one, brother," said Yellow Wolf gravely, "and brought up the other to you; but I thought that you might wish to hear them both talk. Is it well?"

"Very well!" said Oliver. "Yellow Wolf, you are worth ten." He leaned over the two. They were both young Mexicans, utterly unknown to him.

"I saw their shadows sneaking behind us," said Yellow Wolf, "so I turned back and walked on their footprints until a chance came to make them stumble." He shrugged his shoulders. That story was at an end, so far as the Comanche was concerned, except that he could not help adding, "But if one of them is to die, this is a fine scalp, brother!" And he pointed to the flowing hair of one of his victims.

"Mercy, mercy!" gasped that frightened man. "Dear Heaven! Hear me, señor, my deliverer, he has been cutting my throat; I am bleeding to death already."

"You are a fool," said his companion. "You are only slightly scratched. Sit up and wipe the blood away. This is Don Oliver Tay. He is no murderer."

"Dios! Dios!" gasped the frightened fellow, sitting up. "I thought that I was dead. I half think that I am in heaven now! Señor, Heaven be gracious to you!"

"Look," said Oliver Tay, bending a little above them. "I could turn my back on you and let Yellow Wolf take a pair of scalps. Or else I can stay here for five minutes and hear everything that you have to tell me."

The one was sullen and silent. But the frightened companion could not hold his tongue, and he began to chatter straightway. What he had to say was very simple. He was one of a number of spies who had been sent out that evening to comb the valley and, searching everywhere, to bring back whatever word they could of Oliver Tay or of Capiño, Carpio Vega, and Antonio Morales—all of whom were accurately described. And, the instant that they had any tidings, they were to bring them straight to the Casa Venustiano and there make their report to the secretary, Federigo. He, Vicente, had never liked the business; but his companion, Agostina, had lured him on into the adventure.

"I'll cut your throat for these lies," promised Agostino.

But Vicente babbled on. His tongue was at command until Oliver Tay gave the word, and Vega and Morales tied and thoroughly gagged the pair. By that time they knew whatever they wanted, and chiefly how Don Diego was guarding Casa Venustiano on that night. And how the men were posted and, with a finger-drawn chart in the dirt, all the lie of the land at the mountaintop!

CHAPTER XVI.

THE RENDEZVOUS.

IN that tall and graceful campanile which Don Diego had built beside the new church in the valley there had been hastily installed a big bell, worthy of its place; and from that bell midnight was tolled with slow strokes; and the melancholy, brazen notes floated slowly through the air and welled up, one by one, to the Casa Venustiano on the heights above.

"It is ended," said Diego Venustiano to the girl, as they listened to the last of the count coming with long-dying murmurs through the open window of the library. "You see, he has changed his mind; and he will not attempt to see you. You may go to bed now, Marian, and have no fear. For you see that even an Achilles like your Oliver Tay knows that there is a certain point where discretion is the better part of valor; and I don't think that even he would willingly cross me—not in this valley where every man is my man."

"He has not come," agreed the girl faintly; "but still—ah, Heaven help us!"

Don Diego started up from his chair and whirled around at that cry. And he saw against the great arch of the doorway, as in a frame, the most sinister picture which it had ever been his fortune to behold—a tall Indian warrior, naked to the waist, the war feathers braided into his hair, and across the crook of his left arm was lying a sawed-off double-barreled rifle, with two huge mouths looking directly at him.

It had upon Venustiano the effect of a phantom. He could not believe his eyes. "It is some jest which one of our guests is playing on us!" he said through stiff lips to the girl. "There is nothing to fear. This is the Casa Venustiano. No one would dare—not even an Indian madman——"

That sentence remained unfinished, for the second door opened with a sigh at that moment, and against the black heart of the arch appeared the man for whom they had been waiting—Oliver Tay, looking loftier than human, and behind him three grim faces that had been seen before by Venustiano on that day.

"There is one dead man behind us, Venustiano," said Oliver Tay quietly. "If you call out louder than a whisper, you will make the second. Close the door, Capiño. Carpio, watch that window; and, Morales, take the other. Yellow Wolf and I will handle the man."

He advanced close to them; and Venustiano said with equal quiet: "This is brave, Tay. This is a trick worthy of your fame. But tell me, are you mad enough to think that you can take the lady with you to——"

"Not a step," said Oliver Tay. "Not a step if she is unwilling to go. Marian, I haven't come here to drag you away. I have only come to persuade you, if I can. And, first of all, I wish to know why you have come here to Venustiano."

"There was no word from you, month after month. And my father was sick."

"Is that it?" asked Oliver gently. "I should have guessed that. And so you sold yourself, poor child? If there is nothing but this, are you ready to go with me, Marian?"

"Ah, Oliver, I have given Diego my promise! To-morrow——"

"You have given him your promise; but I release you from it," said Oliver Tay.

"This is a new logic," said Venustiano. "Who are you, Oliver Tay, to dispense pardons for——"

"I was some one powerful for you, Venustiano, when twenty men were hungry to hang you over the edge of the cliff. Have you forgotten? I gave you your life freely on that day. But I never gave it to you so that you could steal from me. Do you understand, Marian? He was in the cup of my

hand. I could have tossed him away, but I saved him. And now he has done this. That is why I can release you from your promise."

"Wait, Marian!" interrupted Don Diego hastily. "Let him tell me, first, how he could take you, even if you would go with him? How will you pass down?"

"As we came up, and more safely—with Don Diego along to guard us."

"I understand," said Venustiano. "You will take me with you with a gun against the small of my back. But even at that, after you are away, what can save you? A signal fire from the top of the mountain will block every pass that leads into the valley."

"Señor," said the outlaw, "we have ways of avoiding your outer guards as we have avoided the inner ones. You supplied me with a horse for this work, Don Diego. Have you forgotten Flinder?"

The face of the rich man darkened. He turned to the girl. "He is waiting for your decision," said he. "Will you weigh us both and then make your answer? I could name a good deal, my dear. I could speak of the work that I have done to make this house a home for you, and how I have treated all this great valley like a garden to make it pleasant for you, and how I have made the festival of the rodeo, so that there would be a proper place for the world to see the wife of Venustiano. But I shall not speak of that. I only beg you to see, my dear, that as the wife of Diego Venustiano you will be like a queen. And like a queen you can take care of your father. And in addition, your promise. What has he to offer you, compared with this?"

"I have only one thing to offer you," said Oliver Tay, raising his head so that the golden hair fell back from his shoulders and the light shone upon the tenseness of his face. "A long, long time ago I rode into Siddon Flat in the same stagecoach with you. I was a callow young fool, Marian. Since that time I have ridden on a good many wild trails. I have done a great deal of wrong. The law wants my head, here south of the river. And the law is against me north of the river, also. But still there's a way for me to win back an honest, quiet life. Because, whatever has happened, good and bad, has helped to make a man of me. And there is always some way for a true man to make one woman in the world happy, if she cares for him. I don't offer excuses. For the last year I've run about like a madman, enjoying myself, forgetting everything except the joy of a free life.

"Now, perhaps, I should still be riding trails that have no end, except that Venustiano stole you; and suddenly that made me understand how much I loved you and that I could never be really happy without you. And therefore, Marian, I want you to understand, if you can, that I am ready to lead a new life, if you can come with me. I have no money except stolen money. I can't offer you that. I have no name except an outlawed one. I have no friends except thieves and robbers and murderers, made of gold and steel. I can only offer you my poor self, Marian, and my love for you. Is that enough?"

She made half a step forward, and then she turned and cast a glance over her shoulder at Don Diego—a glance filled with shame and pity and remorse and fear—then she ran to Oliver Tay, and she was lost in his arms.

"She has made her choice," said Don Diego. "You have nothing to fear from me. You are all free to go."

"I have seen your teeth, Venustiano," said Oliver Tay. "We'll trust you when we have to. And, in this place, you are a little too much of a king to be altogether honest."

So Diego Venustiano passed into the shadow of his greatest humiliation. He

himself was forced to go with the marauders to the foot of the cliff, while his men looked on with amazement. He himself had to watch them mount—six people on six fleet horses, with Flinder among them, hardly less glorious, even with his darkened hide.

And the giant riding the great stallion called: "We're away, Diego. And now you're free to hunt us and catch us if you can. We ask for no more sporting chance than this good start."

What a hunt was that, which whirled up Venustiano Valley, with the hundreds of riders and the trained dogs and the terrific rewards offered in tens of thousands of pesos!

Twice they turned back and fought. And twice they checked flying bodies of pursuers, and then rode on. In and out among the mountains they dodged for three days. And then the strong arm of the great outlaw, Venales, reached out and gathered them in, and provided them with fresh horses, and provided for the pursuers false clews on blind trails.

Two days more.

They camped at last on the shoulder of a mountain. Dawn was not far off. And under the broad moon they could see the silver face of the Rio Grande, beyond which lay a land where they would not be free, indeed, but where they would not, at least, be hounded so closely and so savagely. There they fell asleep, crushed with exhaustion, except Yellow Wolf, who seemed to be beyond the need of rest when he rode upon the war trail. He rose from his place beside the fire; and, raising the tip of a blanket, he looked down at the tired, white face of the girl.

"Oliver!" she whispered, and smiled in her sleep.

He turned from her and looked down into the face of the white man, stern, furrowed with resolution after the long ride, still with his will set against tomorrow and its dangers.

Then Yellow Wolf went back and sat down upon his heels. It was all far beyond him. For it seemed to him that there were a thousand things more precious in this world than a mere squaw. He patted his rifle. That was one treasure more beautiful. He touched the hilt of his knife. That was more priceless, also.

He raised his face and saw the crimson day beginning to flow up from the east; and he smiled to think that God had placed that beauty there for the red man to see, while the white men, always blind, slept.

He unrolled a little packet. And he took out and examined three well-cured human scalps. He smiled upon them tenderly. To each man his own happiness, thought Yellow Wolf. To each man his own strength. To each man his own weakness.

But, alas, what weakness was so great as the love of woman? For it seemed to him that already he saw the mighty shoulders of Oliver Tay bowed to the plow.

INTERGLACIAL FOREST IN ALASKA

GEOLOGISTS have been greatly interested in the discovery a few weeks ago of an interglacial forest on the north side of Mendenhall Glacier, near Juneau, Alaska. This find was made by two officers of the United States forest service, Charles H. Flory, district forester, and M. L. Merritt, an assistant forester. An interglacial forest is one that has grown up between two glacial eras. Such a forest, when covered by a second glacier, will sometimes be preserved for centuries.

Horse Before The Car

By **E. C. Lincoln**

Author of "One Dog's Day," etc.

WHOA, there, you Silver! Dog-gone you, ain't you got no brains at all? Now——" But just then Silver got his head down comfortably between his knees and proceeded to break apart in the middle. Across the road he went, grunting, sunfishing, with an occasional fence corner for emphasis. Wally Peters strove his best with spur and voice to persuade the gray six-year-old that just because a rattletrap of an auto honked its horn in passing was no reason for a self-respecting cayuse going loco.

When the smoke of conflict had at last cleared away and Silver, convinced of his error, was once more shuffling along toward Blaine City at an easy running walk, the sole spectator of the battle grinned appreciatively and offered comment:

"Say, Wally, you might a'most learn to ride if you kep' at it long enough. Ol' Silver he tied in like a real champeen, an' yet I didn't notice you pullin' leather not none at all to speak of."

From Art Krantz this was high praise. Wally appreciated it. Consequently he grunted in well-simulated disgust and avoided the subject. "That's the trouble with a hawse," he began, "you can't never tell what he's goin' to do. There warn't no reason at all for Silver's actin' up that a way, 'cept he just took a notion. But a hawse, he's got a mind of his own. When you an' him thinks the same, everythin's fine; when you don't things is apt to pop wide open. Gee! I wisht I had a auto."

Art's eyes opened. He slid crosswise in his saddle, riding easy on one thigh, and prepared to enter wholeheartedly into the one universal, eternal game of the cowboy—argument.

"Why, my gosh, Wally," he protested. "Whatever'd you do with an auto? You couldn't run one, an'——"

"'Course I couldn't," snapped Wally; "but I could learn, couldn't I? Anybody can. Point I'm makin's this: An auto ain't got a mind to think with. It does what you want it to; an' it don't go snortin' an' buckin' all over the country first, neither.

"Look at that clump o' sagebrush ahead there. Suppose I wanter go east of it. If m' hawse wants to go east of it, too, everythin's all right. If he takes a notion to go west then we gotter fight it out. Now an auto'd jest slide round that bush without no fuss whatever."

"But you was raised to hawses," Art protested. "They don't never do nothin' but bang you up a little. It's sorter fun outguessin' 'em, ain't it?"

Wally was firm. "Nope, it ain't. I don't like havin' to guess. I'd swap evey darn cayuse on the Dot Seven for 'most any ol' auto I ever see. An' what's more I got a hunch I'm goin' to have one before long."

"Aimin' to buy it outer your winnin's in the buckin' contest?" laughed his friend.

"Never you mind, boy; I got a hunch. Look at what's comin'!" and he pointed ahead, where a low blue sport car, shining with nickel and new enamel, was skimming toward them along the sandy road.

"Watch yourself," cautioned Art. But this time, true to his reputation for the unexpected, Silver plodded doggedly on without turning an eyelash; and, as the car flashed past, the riders caught a fleeting glimpse of its occupants, three young men in bright-hued rodeo shirts who yelled lustily in greeting. Along the side flapped and fluttered an illegible white banner.

"Must be he's advertisin' the round-up," geussed Art.

"The one I'm goin' to have'll be jest like that!" murmured Wally, entranced. And the mile-killing argument was on again.

So there you have Art and Wally, riding loose and easy through the hot sunshine of mid-August, along the sage-bordered dirt road that led from the North Fork into Blaine City. There was no movement anywhere in all that wide, shimmering expanse of sage, only sunshine and hazy distance through which, far away, the faint blue folds of the Bear Paws lay like a veil about a woman's throat. And Art and Wally welcomed any argument however useless, any subject of discussion, which might help turn the long, monotonous miles into shorter ones.

They came, these two eighteen-year-old riders, from one of those little pockets of the West where the horse is still king, and the cow an object of religious worship—the breaks of the North Fork. There their fathers had settled years before, building up modest ranches as thoroughly cut off from the world as if the railroad had never been heard of. Rough country, that, where cattle wintered well, but of no value to the dry-lander or the hopeful nester.

At the age of three the boys, riding bareback, had begun their education in cowland. At ten they made their first drive to the rails with the fall cut and saw their first railroad train. Twice or three times a year now their wagons, six-horse, rolled up in front of Hazen's Emporium for supplies. Once a year the county assessor jangled by in his jitney.

Just now the boys were enjoying their only real vacation in twelve long months. By mid-August the winter hay is cut, fences are tightened; and there is no more heavy work till the fall round-up starts. And in Blaine City, fifty miles away, the big four-day rodeo begins.

So Wally and Art, a few worn bills stuffed in their pockets, laced chaps and coats behind their saddles, donned clean

shirts of gorgeous hue, strapped spurs on well-worn boots, and set off for Blaine City to show the cock-eyed world that the North Fork raised riders, riders who could scratch anything that wore hair.

"An' I'm tellin' you, Art," insisted Wally obstinately, as along about supper time he loosened the cinches on a sweat-streaked Silver and led him to his rack in the Dark Horse Feed Barn, "I wouldn't never throw a leg over that ol' cayuse again if I jest could get 'most any kind of a car at all."

Blaine City thrilled them. There was much to do. First, of course, was the renting of a room in a lodging house, no easy matter with the crowd that jammed the town to overflowing, and expensive —all of a dollar a night! But who cares for expense on his only vacation of the year? Not Wally and Art, anyhow.

Supper: broad, generous steaks fried in flour, and ice cream to finish with! Then down to the smoke-filled rooms over the First National, where riders from a dozen States—men whose very names sent thrills coursing up and down the boys' spines—milled about, slapping each other's backs, shouting greetings as they made entry and took their contestants' numbers and drew mounts for the first day's rides.

"Hey, Bill! What'd they give you, Bill?"

"Moonshine."

"The ol' snake! He busted me high an' wide at Pendleton las' year. I got King William. Know 'im?"

"Nope. New hawse, I reckon. Say——"

Wally and Art sidled up to the table and gave their names. "I'll put you in for the bareback an' steer ridin', boys," announced the harassed secretary. "Can't promise for the buckin'. We got eighty entries right now. Stick around, though; when the time comes you might get a chance, at that."

Then they went down among the brilliant lights of Main Street, already aflame with the spirit of carnival. There tweed-clad tourists from the East mingled, wide-eyed, with the lanky, Stetsoned sons of the range land. Laughing squaws from a neighboring reservation pattered along in bright-beaded moccasins. Deep-throated ballyhoo men from all over strove to hold the crowd before their garish stands, where the swinging-ball game or the wheel of fortune caught unwary dimes by the hundred.

Wally and Art began at the south end and worked steadily north. They contributed their dimes gladly. Wally played in luck. Art didn't. Moreover, he profanely refused to carry the baby doll, or the doubtful Navajo blanket, or the near-leather sofa pillow with which Wally was presently burdened.

"Sure am playin' 'em sweet, to-night," gloated the latter, as the swinging ball struck the pin fair, and he selected a bright new necktie from the rack thrust forward. "Jest can't seem to lose, nohow. Let's see what's doin' here."

"Here" was a great plate-glass window before which the crowd was even thicker and less mobile. Skillfully the boys edged their way to the front. And there, under the reflectors of myriad lights which brought out every gleam and glimmer of its graceful lines, stood a long, low, sport car, blue-enameled, shining from hood and wind shield and fender.

Wally gasped. "It's the one we seen this mornin', Art—sure is. Look! Look what that sign says!"

For a cardboard poster, in the blackest of black letters, announced that this Harmon Sport Car, twenty-two hundred dollars, 1926 model, would be raffled on Saturday afternoon on the track after the wild-horse race. Tickets, one dollar each!

"I'm a-goin' in," Wally whispered.

"Aw, don't be foolish. They'll be five thousand folks have chances on

that car. What show'd you have in that bunch?"

Wally was adamant. "Can't h-help it," he stammered. "You seen how my luck's been runnin' all evenin'. Somebody's got to get it, ain't he? I'll jest buy one ticket, Art, honest." He went in through the swinging door to press his dollar on a pleasant young man in army clothes who gave him in exchange a small pink slip bearing the numbers 2943.

"What'd you get?" queried Art, halfway between amusement and disgust, when at last he succeeded in prying Wally loose from the show window. "Does she look lucky?"

Wally produced his pink slip. "Two nine four three," he announced. Then a sudden galvanic shiver shook his hundred and seventy pounds from spur to Stetson. He clutched Art's arm with a death grip. "Read 'em, Art! Read 'em!" he pleaded.

"Sure, I can read 'em."

"Add 'em up, boy."

"Two an' nine is eleven, an' four is fifteen, an' three more is—eighteen, ain't it?"

"An' I'm jest eighteen years old!" yelled Wally, so loudly that passers-by stopped and stared; and one thoughtless old bystander reached for his hip hastily.

It was hard to get to sleep that night—hard for Wally, because he was driving a new dream car down the dirt road which led to the North Fork, hard for Art, because Wally kicked so in his driving.

The next few days were busy ones. On Wednesday Wally and Art saw the whole hectic afternoon pass by without getting a single opportunity to show their stuff. Modest, a little confused, they made way for more experienced riders, losing chance after chance to get into the arena. On the second afternoon they had learned to get their ropes on a steer three hours before the fun began and to stay strictly in attendance till the time came to force their way to the chute. By developing a little teamwork they brought it about that by Saturday each had ridden twice in the steer-riding contest and an equal number of times in the bareback show.

They were watching so carefully, learning the tricks of the business so fast, that when, early on Saturday afternoon, "Skeeter" Joe of Oklahoma failed to show up when his name was called. Wally was ready to push forward and claim the ride on that infamous old outlaw, Pancho Villa. That he hit the dust, going wide over Pancho's right shoulder on the fourth bone-cracking jump, was little to his discredit; he had earned a mount in fast company.

"Wally," protested Art, as the discomforted rider hobbled back to the grinning circle by Number Two Chute, "I'll bet you was thinkin' auto, 'stead o' watchin' his crest."

Wally grunted. He knew better. He knew he had had no time for thought when Pancho settled down to work. Still, there was a bit of justice in Art's suggestion. For three days Wally had been spending his every spare minute with his freckled nose glued to the glass of that show window where the soon-to-be-raffled sport Harmon shone in all its glory.

By the time the wild-horse race was called the boys had earned thirty dollars between them, plenty to cover their expenses. They watched the turmoil of that final event from comfortable perches on the arena fence. And then, when the dust of that last chaotic struggle had begun to settle, when the setting sun was shooting level rays from the low western foothills, when the scent of benchland sage was first drifting down into the streets of Blaine City, a low blue sport Harmon nosed its way through the crowd on the track and came to a stop before the grand stand.

The arena attendants cleared an open

space before it. Wally, clutching his pink ticket convulsively, crowded close against a gleaming blue fender. All about him riders massed in a wide semi-circle; before him were restless thousands in the stands. And every single soul, thought Wally hopelessly, had as good a chance as he did.

The bull-throated announcer mounted a running board and raised his giant megaphone. "Ladies an' gentlemen," he bellowed. "As positively the close of this great annual round-up this be-autiful Harmon sport car, offered by the American Legion, will now be raffled for as advertised. Ten numbers will be drawn. The tenth number out of the box gets her—unless the holder ain't on the grounds, in which case the ninth, and so on. All ready, gentlemen?"

A freckled-face boy was lifted high on the shoulders of the crowd. Beside him two members of the Legion raised aloft a great pasteboard carton, half as big as a trunk. Wally shivered. He was glad Art stood close at his elbow. The freckled-face boy reached into the box and drew forth a number. He passed it down to the bull-throated announcer. Wally's heart stopped for three beats, then raced on again. Not his! His chance was still good.

Time after time came the numbers. And now the tenth. Wally said the figures two nine four three over to himself, prayerfully. Never in his life had he wanted anything so much. With every nerve of his being he wished one certain little ticket, the brother to his own, to come up under the groping fingers of the boy.

"And the tenth and winnin' number, ladies and gentlemen, is"—the announcer scrutinized the ticket carefully—"number two thousand, nine hundred and forty——" The final "three" reached Wally's wavering senses through a distant chaos of strange sounds and whirling colors. You don't believe it? Neither did Wally, for a minute. But, as he felt Art's arm about his shoulders, felt himself pushed forward into the open space by the running board, his hunch came back to him with full force. Somebody had to win, didn't they? And it's always, always the man with one ticket. Speechless, he held up the pink slip.

Ten minutes later, when the tumult and the shouting had stopped and the vast stands were emptying their thousands through the exit gates, Wally, resting a proprietary elbow on the polished door, shook hands for the last time with the Harmon agent.

"Great little car, kid," glowed that worthy. "Good for eighty any time you step on 'er. Take 'er away—an' good luck to you!"

Wally flushed a deep-brick red. The sight of Art's grinning face hardly helped matters any. "Mister," he pleaded, "c-couldn't you sorter give me a lesson on her? Y'see, I ain't never drove a car none, jest hawses, an'——"

The agent laughed. "Gosh, I'd forgotten there was anybody like that nowadays. Sure I can. Here, slide in and I'll show you in ten minutes. Any child can drive her. Tell your friend to wait for you at the big gate. Now, look. And watch you don't scratch her with those spurs. She wouldn't like it."

Wally found it surprisingly simple. Just a lever here, a pedal there, a touch on the gears, and off they went around the track while the agent explained with practiced patience. On the second circuit they changed places, and Wally knew the thrill of a lifetime as the splendid machine moved forward obedient to his wishes.

"Fine," said the agent, not so many minutes later. "You're all right now, feller. Drop me at the gate and take your friend home. Come round in the morning, and we'll fix up your license all right."

"But, but—think I can handle her on the road?" gasped Wally.

"Sure. Just take your time and don't get rattled. Here we are."

Every sense alert, painfully alert, Wally brought the Harmon to an easy stop between the gateposts. Far down the gentle slope before him stretched the length of Main Street. He waved eagerly to Art. The agent slipped out.

"She's good for eighty, but take it easy till you feel confident. Well, good —— Hey! You're in gear!"

"I'm what?" asked Wally, bending with interest as he lifted his foot from the clutch.

There was a sudden scream and grinding of mechanism. Wally saw the agent's two feet fly high in air as the blue car lurched forward. Madly Wally reached for the first shining lever that caught his eye. He moved it as far as it would go. With a leap that almost snapped his neck the Harmon settled to action. And from Wally's paralyzed brain all that thin veneer of information vanished like morning mist.

"Hey!" he shrieked as he shot down the long grade toward the crowded traffic on Main Street, a Main Street which suddenly seemed all too narrow in its cañon of brick buildings. "Hey! She's runnin' on me! She's got the bit in her teeth! I can't stop her!"

He was almost upon that tangled mass of traffic ahead before he thought of the horn; then he set his forearm squarely on the button and kept it there. Before that raucous blast the road in front cleared as if by magic. Wally shot into the busy thoroughfare at sixty miles an hour. Shaking with terror, he still clung grimly to the wheel. He threw his feet about the column of the steering gear, closed in his knees, and locked those useful spurs.

Plate-glass windows shot by, massed cars, crowds of pedestrians that shook frantic fists at him. He saw a traffic officer in uniform step in front of him with both arms raised, then spring desperately aside as the blue sport car careened down upon him. Ahead, where the limestone structure of the First National reared its great bulk high above its lowlier neighbors the street seemed suddenly to boil with activity. A man on foot, running rapidly, sprang into the air, fell in a heap, and rolled toward the curb. And as Wally strove frantically to avoid the blurred images that raced before his eyes a low gray touring car, its top up, swung quickly out from the curb, hesitated a moment, then leaped forward at a speed even greater than his own.

Then he had passed the business district, flying through a fringe of frame shacks out onto a dirt road. He was gaining, he saw, on the gray car ahead. At the eminent risk of leaving the road entirely, Wally shot a glance at the dancing dial of the speedometer. It read 82. His pacemaker was within fifty yards. Wally, in a hazy, distant sort of way, wondered at it all.

A man's head and shoulder thrust out from the leaping gray car just before him. Wally, half watching, saw an arm go up. There came a muffled report, a sharp click almost in his ear, and the right side of the boy's face burned like fire. In the wind shield, that immaculate wind shield, appeared a tiny round hole. Wally passed a hand quickly across his cheek. It came away covered with blood.

"My good gosh!" breathed the terrified boy, "they think I'm doin' this for fun!" And the yell he emitted almost drowned the continuous screech of the horn.

Another shot followed. Wally ducked and said a prayer. Then the gray car began drawing ahead; its lead increased to a hundred yards, to a furlong. There it held even. Dimly Wally realized that the noise and confusion behind him had silenced; he heard only the high shrill whine of the racing motor now, and the scream of wind in his ears. A ranch gate flew by, then the streaming

lines of wire fence again. His wrists ached from his frenzied grip on the wheel. But, with a certain and violent death apparently postponed for the moment at least, Wally gradually began to take stock of the situation.

As far as he could see he was doomed to eternity at the rate of—he stole a glance at the dial—seventy-eight miles an hour. He would risk jumping gladly, but not at that speed. Though less than ten minutes had elapsed it seemed as if he had been hurling through space for hours. He tried to visualize the road ahead, a road he had traveled some two or three years earlier in search of strays. It had been graded since, built into a highway.

He remembered it ran straight north along the section lines until it came to the rim of the Valley, then up Wearyall Hill to the bench above. Wearyall Hill! It came to him that before the old stage line had quit an extra team had been kept at the foot of Wearyall to help out in the mile-long pull to the top. Perhaps, and this was his first gleam of hope, perhaps that grade would slow the Harmon enough so he could jump with some chance of coming up with bones intact. He settled himself to watch the road and wait.

The blue sport car leaped and rocked. At intervals a storm drain across the road sent it into the air like a live thing, only to come back to earth with a jar and crash that rattled Wally's teeth. A crazy black sheep dog darted out from a weather-beaten ranch house. He raced at the flying car with mouth open. A long time later Wally thought he heard the sound of faint, far barking.

The gray touring car worried him, too, in that part of his brain which was now working. He wondered why they had drawn so far ahead if they were trying to stop him. He was more than willing to be stopped, but not by bullets. Perhaps they knew that he must slow up when he hit Wearyall. Wally resolved to jump at thirty speedy miles an hour.

He saw a flock of white chickens far ahead in the road. They scattered, fluttering, before the gray car; then they collected again. A spinning white bundle rose suddenly in the air before the nickel hood of Wally's radiator. It burst in an explosion of snowy feathers that covered the wind shield for an instant and were gone.

The rim rock! It seemed to spring toward him at an incredible speed, rising higher and higher. Wally focused his gaze on the spot where the narrow ribbon of road bit into the cliffs in a steep walled coulee. Subsconsciously he saw the gray car disappear into a little hollow, then shoot upward on the first pitch of the grade. Almost instantly the Harmon dropped in a breath-taking nose dive and leaped at the hill ahead. Wally saw that the distance between the two cars was lessening. His motor, faced by the twenty-per-cent climb, had lost its shrill whine; the key of its song was perceptibly lower.

Now the gray car was hidden by a spur of sandstone around which the grade swung in a long curve, a curve almost suicidal at sixty miles an hour. But Wally, fortunately, didn't know that. He took it on two wheels, skidded drunkenly to the edge, and straightened again. Then, just as Wally's eyes cleared from the dust, the end came. He saw with a gasp of horror that the gray car had come to a stop squarely in the middle of the narrow road. He could never pass on the tiny strip remaining. Fifty yards! A figure slid to the roadway and level its arm.

Abandoning all holds Wally dropped to the floor of the car rolled up in a ball like a scared porcupine. A deafening crash, a grinding, tearing jar of metal upon metal, over and over in an earthquake gone mad! A flash of blinding light—then darkness.

Some time later—how much later he neither knew nor cared—something wet and hot burned its way down his throat. It annoyed him. With an effort he forced open one eyelid. He saw a tremendous expanse of sky, incredibly blue, against which strange, half-human shapes floated like formless shadows. He felt a hand slipped beneath his aching head. Wally sat up suddenly.

"If m' spur strap hadn't of busted I'd 'a' rid that snake to a finish," he announced.

The sound of laughter surprised him. "Thinks he's still bronc scratchin'," he heard a voice say. And another, "He'll be all right in a minute. Y'cant kill that short o' dynamite."

The shadow bending over him took form and substance, a heavy, kind-faced man of middle age, on whose vest shone a silver star. Wally struggled to his feet, supported by the sheriff. He looked about him. He was on the edge of the roadbed. Below in the brush of the coulee lay the remains of a gray car, mangled into junk. Twenty yards beyond, still shining bravely, was a jumble of blue metal—his Harmon. The road was filled with men, talking, gesticulating. He noticed two with stars on their vests apparently guarding three dishevelled youths who were handcuffed together. In the center of a curious group Wally thought he saw a still form stretched on the gravel, a coat over its head. Wally was confused—more than confused.

"Feelin' better, kid?" asked a kindly voice.

"Sure," said Wally, taking a long breath. "Sure. I'm all right. Jest what happened, anyhow?"

The sheriff laughed; and the crowd, gathering about him, laughed too. "Well, all I got to say is, you certainly got your nerve. 'Twas Kaplan's gang—shot the cashier an' one of the tellers. They wasn't a car in town could 'a' caught 'em but that Harmon o' yours. I seen 'em when they pulled out from the curb in that big Rissel, an' I says to myself, 'Good-by, cash!' Then you took after 'em in that blue speed devil. Say, you certainly had your nerve with you to shove 'em off the grade like that. We 'was three miles behind, an' it seemed to us——"

All through the sheriff's talk Wally was aware that some one was making faces at him violently. With considerable surprise he recognized the Harmon agent. That worthy was repeatedly drawing a finger across his mouth and winking. Finally it percolated. Wally winked a bruised and battered eye in return. If folks wanted to think he chased bank robbers for the sport of the thing they could.

"Too darn bad, though," finished the sheriff, some of whose conversation Wally had missed, "for you to spile that brand-new car o' yourn."

The Harmon agent spoke up. "Don't you worry over the Harmon, sheriff; she's a mighty well-built little car. I went down to look her over. She's roughed up considerable but nothing real serious. Five hundred'll fix her good as ever. Or," he added quizzically, "I'll give him a thousand for her just as is."

Wally gazed down at the wreck. "You mean that?" he queried.

The agent nodded.

"Then," assured Wally with a sigh of relief, "you sure bought a automobile. She made eighty-two, oncet."

"An' with his half the reward he can pretty near buy a new flivver, anyhow," suggested the sheriff.

This was a new idea. It listened well. Wally inquired the details.

"Why, the standin' reward the Bankers' Association has up for bank robbers! You get half, an' me an' the deputies get the other half. Five hundred, you get. Didn't you know that when you took after 'em?"

"No, I didn't," asserted Wally, honestly.

The groups of serious onlookers were scattering now, climbing back into their conveyances and heading for town. The sheriff beckoned a deputy.

"You shove them prisoners into Joe's back seat," he commanded; "an' you plug 'em quick if they start anything. I'll take the kid with me. I don't reckon by the looks of him he wants to be joggled round much. Ready, feller?"

Wally looked at the sheriff's car doubtfully. He took a step toward it, then stopped. He looked at it more carefully. The longer he gazed the stronger became that painful feeling in the pit of his stomach.

"Sheriff," he apologized at last, "I somehow—jest for to-day—I feel like I done enough car ridin'. It kinder makes me sick, thinkin' of it. Tell you what—you get hold of Art Krantz at the Diamond Rooming House an' tell him if he wants to make some easy money to throw a saddle on ol' Silver an' lope him out here jest as quick as he can. I'll sit down an' rest till he shows up. They's one nice thing about a hawse," remarked Wally irrelevantly as the sheriff turned to go. "A hawse knows what he's doin'. A feller don't have to do his thinkin' for him."

STATE FLOWERS OF THE WEST

The Apple Blossom—Arkansas

THE distinction of being the only one of our western States which has chosen a floral emblem that thoroughly combines utility and ornament, belongs to Arkansas. No one who has seen an apple orchard in all the fragrant glory of its pink-and-white bloom can deny the beauty of it. In 1901 the legislature made the apple blossom the acknowledged queen of the State.

The gnarled crab apple is the direct ancestor of the luscious cultivated variety. It seems a far cry from the justly famous black apples of Arkansas to the sour and twisted crab, but the relationship is closer than one might think. The apple bears a close kinship, even more difficult to realize, to another family of high standing in the floral world; that of the rose. Like the tomato and the strawberry it is claimed by that great order, *Rosacæ*.

Literature and history are rich in allusions to the apple. The belief in the apple as an emblem of prosperity is embodied in the benediction that used to accompany an old Saxon coronation ceremony; to wit: "May this land be filled with apples."

In old England the village lasses used to gather crab apples and mark them with the initials of their lovers. When Saint Michaelmas Day came round the most nearly perfect apples were supposed to represent the men who would make the best husbands. The custom persists even to-day that an apple paring thrown over the shoulder on Hallowe'en will form the initial of the future mate.

With such a fascinating history, then is the floral favorite of Arkansas endowed. And for a State whose apples are so highly prized in the markets of the world no fitter emblem could have been chosen.

The Temple of the Sun

By Arthur Preston Hankins

Author of "Get Jimps," etc.

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

ARCHÆOLOGIST and prospector, Sim Fannan finds golden plates of Aztec origin in mysterious ruin in the Southwest. Disabled by his own dynamiting operations, he is rescued by the lovely and talented Kathleen Dancy.

Recovering from the explosion in San Francisco, Sim tells his fiancée, Eileen Calmar, of his discovery and where his map is hidden. Next day the map is stolen; Sim is convinced that it has been taken by George Arlie, his lifelong enemy and bitter rival—perhaps with the connivance of Eileen. Sick and disillusioned, Sim returns to the desert only to find that Arlie has arrived before him, but has been hurt in an automobile accident.

To earn money for necessities, Kathleen has been playing the violin in a dance hall. Here she discovers that the proprietor and "Patango Pete," a gangster, believe the source of Sim's wealth is the $70,000 bar of gold recently stolen from a bank messenger. The two crooks get some further information from Arlie and plan to rob Sim. Kathleen steals the map in Arlie's possession, but is forced to give it up. However, she has not only falsified the map she gives the robbers, but she has kept a careful tracing of the original. With this to guide her she sets out to warn Fannan.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TWO-GUN MAN.

AS Kathleen Dancy rode along in the middle of the pack train that headed southward under the brilliant desert stars, her mind was busy. What was the meaning of all this, anyway? Had this George Arlie and Sim been rivals for the hand of the mysterious Eileen whom Sim had mentioned? Had Arlie known that Sim was a highwayman before Bottleneck Oshanter told him of the stolen bar of gold? Had Arlie come from San Francisco for the purpose of showing up Sim in the eyes of Eileen? Why hadn't Sim told her more about this girl? What was her last name? Who was she, anyway?

Everything was a mystery to her, and she could answer none of the questions that she had put to herself. But she knew that she loved Sim Fannan—"Gun-fanner Fannan," if people chose to call him that—and that she was on her way to warn him that his map had been stolen by a man named Arlie, and that Arlie had seemed on the point of joining forces with the Oshanter Gang when she interrupted pro-

ceedings by stealing the precious drawing herself.

She was on her way to warn him that the Oshanter Gang was on his trail—that they at least would be able to trail him into that section of the desert where his gold was hidden. She was on her way to make him return that gold to the men who owned it. And then—then, if he wanted her—they would strike out together, penniless, perhaps, but free from dread and the shadow of crime, and happy.

Of the two silent men with whom she traveled she knew nothing except that kind, bluff, old Doctor Bayard had vouched for one of them—John Ray. Both of them rode ahead of her, mere blurs in the night. She wondered, as her mule's rolling gait bore her along, whether or not the Oshanter Gang had taken the trail to-night. She doubted it. They would consider that there was no reason for a rush. Certainly Ed Ayers would never think she would dare to ride into the desert to help her lover! But hadn't she been too meek about surrendering the map? She knew she had. But she couldn't act, it seemed. Her readiness in handing it over certainly must have aroused suspicion in Ayer's keen mind.

Then thoughts of her father came to her, and her eyes filled with tears. Surely she had been sorely tried within the past two days! But she dried her eyes and straightened herself in the saddle. She had work to do, and there was no time for idle tears. Would she be able to undergo the difficult undertaking that lay ahead of her? It was no girl's task, this torturing journey under hot desert skies; and she knew it well. But she must accomplish it for the sake of the man she loved.

All night long they drifted southward, and then gray streaks of dawn crept into the eastern sky above the grim mountains. As she watched the monarchs grow lighter and lighter under the touch of the waking sun, she remembered that Simeon Fannan had led her to believe that his gold was in some remote mountain fastness. But the map proved conclusively that he had allowed her to believe a falsehood. He had been distraught the night he hastened away from her. He had been wrestling with himself, she thought. She knew that he would have confessed all before marrying her. She romantically believed in him, and——

"Better camp, hadn't we, Miss Dancy?" a voice floated back to interrupt her dreams. "The stock's hungry an' tired; and I reckon you are, too. There's water just ahead."

"All right," she agreed. "Do whatever you think best at all times, Mr. Ray. You know the desert better than I do."

They camped by a desert water hole as daylight advanced. It was light enough, while breakfast was being cooked, for Kathleen to observe her companions for the first time. John Ray was a stockily built man with a square, honest face and an enormous dark mustache. He looked physically capable but dull, commonplace, and unimaginative. Hercules Hanger was of a different type. Blond, wiry, lean-faced, quick-eyed, alert, and a two-gun man was "Herk" Hanger. His blue eyes studiously avoided hers.

"I see you don't pack a six," remarked Kathleen to John Ray as the trio settled down to eat. She had heard the phrase "pack a six" and supposed she ought to use it.

"No, I'm peaceable, Miss Dancy," returned Ray as he poured the dark, brown coffee.

"But we may get into difficulties," she told him. "You see I have a gun"—she displayed it—"which Doctor Bayard gave me."

John Ray smiled. "I bet you couldn't hit anything," he offered banteringly.

"I don't know about that," she said noncommittally. "Some women shoot pretty well, you know."

She looked up to find Herk Hanger eying her closely. He immediately dropped his glance in confusion and continued gobbling his food.

"What's the grand idea of this party, anyway, miss?" asked Ray. "Doc didn't tell me much. Didn't seem to know much to tell. "

"I've a map of a certain part of the desert which we're to find," Kathleen enlightened him. "First we go to Nat Dabney's. That's indicated on the map. It will be easy to locate the place we're seeking after we leave there."

"Water holes marked, and everything like that?"

"Oh, yes. It's very thoroughly done."

For a considerable space of time there was silence, while the sun streamed on the San Anselmo Mountains to the west. The mules and horses chonked their food noisily. Ground birds twittered close at hand in the greasewood bushes.

Then suddenly said John Ray, "Doc didn't let me know there was likely to be any shootin'. I wasn't lookin' for a job like that, Miss Dancy."

"Perhaps there won't be," Kathleen returned. "But I thought everybody in this country went armed."

"I don't," Ray said stoutly. "I ain't lookin' for trouble, like some of 'em are."

"Meanin' me?" put in Herk Hanger swiftly, and the expression on his face was none too pleasant.

"Not especially, Herk," replied Ray offhandedly. "Some men pack guns for ornament. Maybe you're one of 'em. But for my part I ain't got any use for a hip cannon, and I manage to git along."

Silence set in once more. It seemed to the girl that the atmosphere was a trifle strained. Ray seemed thoughtful as he looked off toward the sunbathed mountains with solemn dark eyes. Hanger was stretched out on the ground smoking a brown-paper cigarette. They were waiting for the stock to finish eating before taking the trail again. Not another word was spoken until John Ray arose and said that they had better be on their way. "Tired?" he asked the girl, as he saddled her mule.

"Somewhat," she replied. "I used to ride a great deal, but I'm out of practice."

"Better take it easy to-day, then," he told her. "Get toughened to it gradually, understand? And say, Miss Dancy——"

"Yes?"

"I guess, when we get to Nat Dabney's, I better find somebody to take my place for the rest o' the trip."

"Oh, goodness! You're not going to desert me, are you? I'm depending on you, Mr. Ray. Doctor Bayard vouched for you but said he didn't know anything about Mr. Hanger. You see how it is."

"Well, I don't know any too much about 'im myself," said Ray. "But Doc said he wanted at least two men, and I couldn't find anybody else that wanted to make the trip. But I wouldn't worry about Hanger. I think he's all right."

"What makes you think so, Mr. Ray?"

"Well, a fella I know at Two Sisters said he'd known 'im for some time. This fella mentioned Hanger when I spoke to 'im as I was lookin' around for a man to go with us."

"So your information about him is entirely secondhand?"

"Well, just about. You see, miss, I didn't know there was anything secret about this business, or that there might be shootin'. I wouldn't have had anything to do with it if I'd known, but I

certainly wouldn't have brought along a man I didn't know right well."

"Well, of all things!" gasped Kathleen. "I hate to say it, but it does seem as if Doctor Bayard has bungled a little."

"Are you right sure you told Doc just what you was up to, Miss Dancy?"

"Well, no. I'm afraid I didn't, Mr. Ray. I suppose it's all my fault. But the secret isn't mine; and I—I guess I didn't explain sufficiently to Doctor Bayard."

"Say, what business has a girl like you goin' out in the desert lookin' for a gun fight?" he said explosively.

Kathleen compressed her lips. "I have to go," she said. "There's no one to take my place."

He shrugged his sturdy shoulders. "Well, I don't wanta pry into your affairs; but it don't look right to me for a girl like you to—— Oh, well, le's forget it. I'll see you to Nat Dabney's, anyway. And maybe by then I'll change my mind. I don't like to be a quitter; but I got a wife and kids, and I can't afford to git mixed up in any shootin' scrape."

At this point Herk Hanger came up leading mules and horses and began throwing on the saddles, so Kathleen and Ray refrained from further speech about the matter.

Kathleen was a saddle-weary girl when, toward the close of the following day, they trailed into Nat Dabney's and made camp close to the store and post office.

There was little more to the settlement. Nat Dabney had plenty of artesian water, and that was his reason for being there. He raised considerable alfalfa and wintered a few cattle on it. His place was a hotel, store, saloon, and post office in one, despite government regulations concerning the latter combination. It was merely a halfway point between Two Sisters and Stranger, a town on the Mexican border farther to the south. Except that close-in ranchers found the store and post office a convenience, to say nothing of the worn old walnut bar with the friendly brass rail that ran its length!

When the mules and horses had been attended to and supper was over, John Ray said to Kathleen, "Let's walk over and have a talk with Nat. I ain't seen the old bruiser in two years or more. Maybe he c'n suggest a man to take my place."

"Oh, then you've decided to leave me?"

"Not quite yet," replied Ray. "Depends on what Dabney has to say." He turned to Herk Hanger, who was lolling on the ground. "You're goin' on to the end, ain't you, Herk?"

"Sure," came the ready answer. "The pay's good; and the grub's good; and I don't mind the society. I don't reckon I'm scared of anything, either. I'll stick."

Without a word John Ray turned away from him and walked by the side of Kathleen to the rambling building that represented Nat Dabney's.

The proprietor was a brisk, wizened little man with the chin whiskers of a goat, and gray as a badger. When he and Ray had talked a little, after a long handshake, Ray whispered to the girl: "You stick here and tell the old boy your troubles, while I slip back to camp. I'm beginnin' to doubt that fella Herk, Miss Dancy. He's entirely too eager to go out where they's likely to be a gun fight for the wages you're payin'. This is the first chance I've had to get a look at 'im alone."

He hurried out into the night, and Kathleen leaned on the counter and talked with the famous old desert character. Before many words had passed between them she was firmly convinced that she could trust him. She poured her story into his eager

ears, telling everything, except that she took pains to refer to Sim Fannan as a prospector.

"Sure, I remember 'im. I've took in a lot of his gold. But he didn't come through here on his way to his camp. He must have a fairly well payin' claim."

Kathleen was deeply surprised that Sim had not passed through the place on his way to the cave. It had not occurred to her that she might reach Nat Dabney's ahead of him.

"And I know about them boys that was tryin' to trail 'im, too," the old man went on. "Though I guess they don't know I'm onto 'em. But they had no other reason to stick around here. I ain't got much to offer in the way of entertainment but moonshine liquor; and they was in debt to me for that when they left, a short while back.

"And so you're headin' out to this Fannan's claims, eh? And you think that maybe this Oshanter Gang will try to beat you to it. I say, lay off, miss, lay off! You're monkeyin' with dynamite when you buck the Oshanter boys and their pardners. John goin' with you?"

"I hope so. But tell me, please, wouldn't Mr. Fannan be obliged to pass through here on his way to the claims?"

"Depends on where they're at."

But this Kathleen could not divulge. Sim had gone out into the desert from Stranger, to the south, she readily decided. Then she asked Dabney if he knew Hercules Hanger.

"Not by name," he answered. "But if I could get a look at 'im—there ain't many on this old desert I ain't seen a time or two, and I don't forget."

"I'll see to it that you have a look at him," said Kathleen.

Asked if he knew of a trustworthy man who might be induced to take John Ray's place, he shook his grizzled head. "Nobody hardly at all about here these days, miss. Everybody's hit the trail to the Shanty Crick strike. That strike plumb ruined me; though I do sell somethin' now and then to folks ramblin' through, all het up with the gold fever."

John Ray returned. "He wrote a letter and dropped it in the mail box in the post office room," he reported in a whisper. "He just come out an's on his way back to camp."

"Tell him I want to see him in here a moment," the girl said quickly. "I want Mr. Dabney to look him over."

Ray nodded and hurried out.

"Hey, Herk!" she heard him call. "Miss Dancy wants to see you. C'mon in here a minute."

"He has just mailed a letter," Kathleen told Nat Dabney. "I don't like that."

"Don't mean nothin', maybe," he returned. "But I guess if it's addressed to anybody I know I might—— Hohum! I begin to get tired along about this time o' the evenin'. That bench outside the door is sure wearin' on the nerves. Here he comes. I'll give 'im the eagle eye."

"Can you think of anything more that we'll need for the trip?" Kathleen asked Herk in businesslike tones as the two-gun man slouched in. "Mr. Ray isn't sure whether or not he'll go on with us. If he doesn't, I'll have to depend on your experience as a packer. What can you suggest?"

"I'd take a lot o' bacon, miss," answered Hanger. "There's strength in that. But if you want, I'll look over the pack and see if they's anything else I think we need."

"Do so, please," said Kathleen; and Herk Hanger at once loafed out.

Nat Dabney shook his gray head. "Never saw that boy in my life before," he said. "But he's a heavy-hardware man, now, ain't he? Speakin' about hardware reminds me of a order that I'm sendin' in for some miner's

pans. Might's well sell 'em to the poor boobs as they drift through here as not. I think I'll look at the envelope and see if I addressed her right."

He went into that part of the building devoted to the post office, and returned in a minute's time.

"Danged if I ain't gittin' old!" he chuckled. "I oughta sent that there order for miner's pans to The Western Wholesale Hardware Company in Los Angeles, and darned if I didn't address the envelope to Mr. Gideon Jersey, Nat Dabney's, Californy. Right here in my own city she was sent, by gosh! And to Mr. Gideon Jersey, a guy I never heard of. Can you beat it! Old! I'm dead already!"

John Ray stared at Nat Dabney as if he thought him suddenly insane, but Kathleen understood.

CHAPTER XVII.

HERK HANGER AGAIN.

SINCE it seemed impossible for Kathleen to secure another man, John Ray had decided to see her through her precarious undertaking. He bought an automatic pistol from Nat Dabney and purposed carrying it concealed. The two did not know whether to mistrust Herk Hanger or not. It seemed strange that he should write a letter to a man named Gideon Jersey, at Nat Dabney's, when Nat had never heard of such a man. John Ray thought he knew the names of all the men who were suspected of composing the Oshanter Gang. Besides the two brothers, there were Ted Bagley and Aaron Claggett.

"I never heard of but four of 'em," Ray declared. "But, for all I know, there may be sev'r'l more. And this here Gideon Jersey may be one of 'em, though the name's new to me."

"Shall we discharge Herk and go on alone, or give him a trial?" asked the perplexed girl.

"It'll be a tough trip for just the two of us, miss," was Ray's slow answer.

"Oh, let's not be foolish!" she cried suddenly. "I'm unnecessarily suspicious."

Then she told Ray all that she had told Doctor Bayard and Nat Dabney, carefully guarding Sim's reputation, of course, and asked Ray's further advice.

"Better let me pack that map you got," he suggested. "Hanger heard you say you had a map, you remember. And I'm just wonderin' if it would be safe for us to trail outa here a day's ride, camp, and me slip back at night to Nat's to see who collected that letter. Hard on the hoss, o' course, but——"

"We might try that," she half accepted. "Though I'd hate to be left alone with Hanger on the desert while you were gone—that is, if he's not trustworthy. Oh, Mr. Ray, do you think it possible that he's connected with the Oshanter Gang?"

His thick shoulders shrugged. "I wish I could answer that," he told her. "Will you let me have the map?"

"Certainly. I expected you to carry it after we left Nat Dabney's, so that you could direct our course."

She passed it to him. They were in the rear end of Nat Dabney's store. At the front with Nat, Herk Hanger was adding fresh supplies to the pack. It was the morning following their arrival. Herk had not yet been told that John Ray had decided to see Kathleen through, despite his better judgment.

Ray held the tracing in his thick fingers and studied the lines with care. Kathleen pointed to where she had made the X marked "Cave," which she hoped would mislead the outlaws.

"I know the country between here and there pretty fair," he mused. "I won't git lost, anyway, even after I've gone farther than I've ever been before, with this map to guide me. See this place here, this string o' buttes,

with the tallest one named Blacksmith's Anvil?"

"Yes," said Kathleen.

"That's our first campin' place. I know there's water there, even if the map didn't say so. I could make it from there to here and back before mornin'. And I could walk next day and let my hoss rest, sayin' I was saddle-galled and would rather hoof it."

"Perhaps we'd better try that, then. But suppose the man to whom the letter is addressed hasn't come for it?"

"If he's a member o' the Oshanter Gang, I think he'll call for that letter not long after we've hit the trail," was Ray's opinion. "They can't afford to lose time, you know, no more'n you can."

"Well, we'll just have to go ahead and do our best, I guess." The girl sighed wearily.

And so they started fifteen minutes later. The sun was a ball of fire that blistered the land. The hoofs of the mules and horses sank pastern deep in the yielding sand. Cactus, yucca, greasewood, sage—that was all in the way of verdure. Lizards blinked on scorching stones. Horned toads screwed their bodies into the sand and became a part of it, so far as the eye could see. In the hazy distance swam yellow buttes. Some of them seemed to hang in the dust-colored sky, an optical illusion. Beyond, the green mountains beckoned, cool, inviting, mockingly remote.

Wearily the stock plodded on, sweating, flanks heaving. The riders lolled in their saddles, hoping for a movement in the air, which never came. Saddle horns burned the hands when touched. Mouths were parched, and tongues felt thick and useless.

John Ray dropped back beside Kathleen about one o'clock. "Sky don't look any too promisin'," he declared. "Expect sandstorms any time now. Hope we don't run into one."

Kathleen nodded. She was too tired to reply. Ray rode to the head of the cavalcade, and nothing else was spoken between the trailers until they struck a water hole at two o'clock, where they camped for their belated nooning.

On again at three! The Blacksmith's Anvil, a speckled butte aptly named because of its peculiar shape, loomed larger now. Ray thought that they would reach it by half-past six. Voicing this prediction, he once more became the head of the column and rode on steadily, head bent.

Never before in her life had Kathleen Dancy been so nearly exhausted as when the cavalcade came to a halt under one overhang of The Anvil which was in part responsible for its name. It seemed almost impossible for her to throw her leg over the cantle of her saddle; and, when she did so, her other foot slipped from the stirrup, and she fell in a heap on the ground—unhurt, of course, for the sand was like a feather mattress.

Ray set her on her feet and ordered her to rest while he and Herk Hanger attended to the animals. They watered and fed them, then searched for petrified yucca and dug up greasewood roots to make a fire. While this was going on the girl lay stretched out in the partial shade of the huge butte and gasped for breath.

"Storm's sure comin'," Ray told her presently, standing over her. "I can't say when, maybe to-night, maybe not for sev'r'l days."

"There's one consolation," Kathleen answered. "It will hamper the others as much as it will us."

"Uh-huh," Ray returned, and went about his cooking.

There was plenty of water in the spring that bubbled up under the butte. When the girl had doused her head repeatedly in a bucket of it and eaten her supper she felt revived. Besides, it was growing cooler fast. The one kind

feature of the desert is its crisp, cold nights, which rebuild the worn-out wanderer and drive him on to new efforts through the dreadful day to follow.

They sat in a circle about the glowing coals of petrified yucca when the meal was over. Ray and Herk were smoking. Kathleen sat dreaming, waiting for the dark, when Ray might slip away and return to Dabney's.

Hercules Hanger turned over and eyed the girl with his pale blue eyes. "Feel too tired to give us a tune?" he asked presently. "Might perk us all up, maybe."

Kathleen did not feel too tired for that. She felt that to play would soothe her and turn her thoughts from the grimness of this, for her, gigantic undertaking.

"I'll play for you," she said.

Herk struggled to his feet. "I'll git your fiddle box," he offered. "I never heard you play but onct, and that time it kinda got my goat. You sure c'n scrape that hoss hair, lady!"

"I'm wonderin' that you brought that violin along," Ray ventured, as Herk loafed through the sand to the pack bags. "Won't this here desert air ruin her, Miss Dancy?"

"I don't know," she answered. "But I didn't dare leave it in my cabin. It's the most expensive thing I own. You'd be surprised if you knew what I've been offered for my violin. There aren't many in the United States so valuable. I've always shrunk from parting with it, no matter how badly I needed money."

Ray nodded. "I know some of 'em cost a lot," he said. "I saw one in a window in Los Angeles once with a tag on it that said 'Fifty Dollars.'"

Kathleen only smiled at that and thanked Herk Hanger as he laid the case beside her. She removed the precious instrument, her one priceless treasure, and fondled it, and examined it. The gut was dry, and worried lines came in her forehead. She tightened the hair in the bow. She tuned the violin and had difficulty in making the pegs keep the strings stretched taut. Then she stood erect, silhouetted against the tin-foil moon that was mounting the sky, and played to it, soulfully as always. She played one simple selection after another, semi-classical pieces which her auditors might understand.

"By gosh!" breathed Herk as she at last sat down and laid the instrument in its case. "I never heard nothin' like that in all my life, and I'll bet I've heard as much fiddlin' as the next fella. You don't seem to squeak when you fiddle, Miss Dancy."

"Please see that it's carefully packed on top but where the sun can't get at it," was all that Kathleen said.

Higher and higher rose the moon.

"Me for the hay," Ray announced, while the evening still was young.

The others were readily agreeable. Herk sought a niche in the base of the butte that he had staked out for himself. Kathleen went in under the overhang, where there was a cavelike opening that was quite secluded. Ray looked over the stock a little and melted into the night. Just where he had decided to make his bed Kathleen Dancy did not know. She decided, once she was stretched out under her blankets, that she would remain awake until she knew whether or not Ray meant to make an effort to slip away. But she was asleep five minutes after she had sought her bed.

She was awakened suddenly by a light touch on her shoulder. "Come," said the voice of Hercules Hanger, "you and me's got to be hittin' the trail, kid."

Instantly alarmed, her hand darted under the cloak that served her as a pillow.

Hanger chuckled. "Oh, I got your

little gat before I touched you," he said. "Come on, now, no funny business. Everything's packed, and they's a whoppin' old sandstorm blowin' up. But I c'n lead you through it. I wanta be gettin' on before she blows, so's the sand'll cover our tracks."

"But——" Words stuck in the scared girl's throat.

"Oh, I suppose yuh'll have to be explained to before yuh'll act reasonable," Herk said gruffly. "I win, that's all. I was waitin' for Ray to pull the stunt he did to-night. I saw 'im snoopin' around when I was mailin' a certain letter at Nat Dabney's. So I wasn't surprised when he snuck off about half an hour ago. He wants to find out who's gonta git that letter.

"I knew you two suspicioned me. Yes, I'm with the Oshanter boys; but it ain't generally known up around Two Sisters and Shanty Camp. The boys wasn't satisfied the way you handed over that map so meek and mild the other evenin'. So when Ayers left you he sent word to me by automobile at Two Sisters to watch Doc Bayard and see if he had anythin' on his chest. He did, and here I am. Understand?"

"Ye-yes," gasped Kathleen. "I—I think I've understood all along."

"Then le's be goin'. I been through your things but can't find the map you mentioned to Ray. Where is it?"

"He has it," answered Kathleen.

"None o' that! Where's that map?"

"I tell you I gave it to Ray. I expected him to do the leading. He needed it."

Herk Hanger remained a motionless black spot before the face of the moon for several moments. Then he spoke again. "Well, that sounds reasonable," he decided. "But it don't keep me from takin' you along. Come, git up. I know you're tired, but you've had a rest an' c'n ride jest as well's not. Will I have to drag you out o' them blankets, kid?"

"What do you want?" she faltered, sitting erect.

"Patango Pete'll explain all that. He knows you musta faked that map you give Ed Ayers. So I'm gonta take you to the Oshanters an' keep you till we find Ray and git the right map from him. He'll hand it over to git us to turn you loose, I guess. C'mon! No monkey business. If you don't come, I'll make you."

"I won't! You can't!" she cried angrily at last, as her first stupor left her.

"Oh, is that so!"

And next moment he had both her wrists in his enormous hands and had jerked her to her feet. "Now, listen, kid," he told her ominously; "you may think this is only doll playin', but it's mighty serious business with me. You're gonta ride with me to-night and ride hard, er I'll tie you in your saddle and lead your hoss behind me. Think fast. Which is it gonta be? You know I can do jest what I say I will."

Kathleen did know it. Her head swam with terror of him. Hot tears stood in her eyes—tears of rage and bitter disappointment.

He still held her wrists. Now he released one of them, tightened his grip on the other; and, scooping up the blankets, he half-dragged her out of the cavelike aperture.

Around a prong of the Blacksmith's Anvil swept the desert sandstorm, whistling mockingly in her ears, casting particles of sand into her sunscorched face. But on toward the waiting animals Herk Hanger dragged his prize.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE LETTER.

ABOUT four hours after Kathleen Dancy's party had left Nat Dabney's, a dusty automobile drove in and stopped before the rambling old building. A slim, wiry, ascetic-faced man

in khaki, with his arm in a sling, got out and paid the driver. The machine turned and started back toward Stranger. And, as the passenger, traveling bag in hand, started to mount the steps to the store Nat Dabney rushed out, the goat's beard on his chin working up and down with his excitement.

"Fannan! By golly, man, I thought you'd made it in to your claims from some other town on the border! Listen: There ain't any time to lose. They's a girl been here——" And, words tumbling over one another, the old man poured out the story of Kathleen's passage.

"But listen, listen!" he said, as Sim, his face showing white through the coat of tan, tried to interrupt. "That ain't half of it. Not over half an hour ago a fella drifted in on hossback and said his name was Gideon Jersey, and I hadta give 'im the letter that this Hanger boy dropped in the box. I'm postmaster, you understand, and couldn't do otherwise. But I watched 'im go. He took up about the same trail the lady did when she hazed 'em out. And, say, Fannan—what was you aimin' to do?"

Simeon Fannan tried to keep calm, but this information had struck him hard. "I was intending to hire some burros and pack outfits from you," he said, "and make it out to my claims. But now——"

"Now what you gotta do is fork a hoss and git after this Jersey fella. Run 'im down and git that letter away from 'im. I got the hoss that'll ketch 'im. C'n you do the rest?"

"Saddle the horse for me," said Sim between straight lips. "I can do the rest."

"But your arm, man?"

"I can handle the situation. Make it snappy, Nat."

Fifteen minutes later, mounted on a black horse whose dancing walk proved that he was ready and willing and able to eat up the long, hot miles, Sim rode into the desert in the wake of the recipient of Hercules Hanger's letter.

He rode hard. This man Jersey, whoever he might be, had half an hour's start; and no time must be wasted. But the quivering black body under him gave Sim confidence. The black was fresh from Nat Dabney's corral—had not had a saddle on him for a week, Nat claimed. No doubt Gideon Jersey's mount had traveled many weary desert miles before his owner called to get that letter.

Swiftly the miles dropped behind the disdainful hoofs. Sim glanced in a worried way at the dusty-looking sky. All too well did he know the desert signs. A sandstorm was not far off. He must overtake this Jersey before the wind began howling over the desert, driving clouds of sand before it, obliterating all other sounds, all tracks, all chances of sighting the quarry. It was not long before Sim noticed, far off on his right, a tiny black speck in the endless yellow sweep. He had brought along nothing but a canteen of water, his cartridge belt and six-shooter, and a pair of strong binoculars.

He stopped his eager horse and trained the glasses on the distant speck. It represented a man on horseback, and it was moving steadily away from him in the direction of the mountains. Sim knew that country like a book. He estimated distances while holding the binoculars to his eyes. He knew that some miles ahead of the far-off rider lay a deep arroyo, extending north and south. If he pressed his horse to the utmost speed that was safe, he might ride down into that arroyo, turn north, and surprise the letter-bearer when he reached it. Carefully his trained eye estimated again. Yes, he could make it, if the horse held out.

He crammed the glasses in their case, swung the black around and sent

him ahead at the top of his speed, pitying him the while. For the sun was deadly, and the sand sucked in cruelly about his hoofs and hampered his progress.

"Cramping your style, old kid?" Sim patted the streaming neck.

The black tossed his head and struggled the harder. At last the arroyo! On his hocks the horse slid down into it. The footing here was better, for the water-washed bottom was solid save in places where sand had drifted over it. These Sim managed to avoid in many instances as they raced north, with the steep bank several feet above his head.

Fully an hour had passed since he sighted the black speck on the desert. Had he been seen? He doubted it, for the rider had not quickened his horse's pace. He had continued to travel steadily toward the mountains at a deliberate though mile-consuming cowpony trot.

When the black had traveled perhaps a mile of the twisting arroyo Sim halted him. Sim Fannan was an expert horseman. The arm that reposed so stiffly in the plaster cast bothered him considerably in his movements, but he was able to stand erect in the saddle. To his satisfaction he discovered that his head was just above the bank of the steep arroyo. His eyes swept the desert round about. Some distance farther north, he saw the lone horseman drawing near to the earth scar.

Simeon spread his legs, dropped, and caught the saddle with his muscular thighs. Before he had slid into his seat the black was away again, racing up the arroyo as if he knew just what was required of him. Soon, however, Sim was obliged to rein him in lest the thundering of his hoofs be heard by the approaching man. Once more he stood in the saddle while the well-trained horse, though impatient and seemingly eager to kill himself for his rider, stood stationary. Sim's head had no more than bobbed above the bank when he promptly ducked it. A man on a bay horse was riding straight toward him, looking for a convenient place to get down into the deep depression.

There was such a place just ahead, Sim's quick glance told him. Once more his sliding thighs caught the sides of the saddle, but it was with difficulty that he restrained the horse. Unable to handle him, he pulled him in and swung to the ground, dropping the black's reins before him. Whereupon the horse became statuesque and passive, in truly Western style.

Sim crept forward a dozen steps until he was close to the slanting place which he knew the other man would use to slide down into the arroyo. He drew his six-shooter with his left hand, thanking his lucky stars that he had practiced shooting with both hands. He pressed his body against a perpendicular portion of the bank, close to the slide, and waited breathlessly.

The wind howled down the arroyo occasionally, but as yet no great amount of sand was blowing. Little dust devils were kicked into activity and went whirling across the hard floor of the depression, dancing in glee as if in anticipation of the big frolic to follow. There came a rush of sand and stones. The head of a bay horse, neck slanted downward, came into view, then the horse's body, and the man upon his back. Another shower of sand, then——

"Up with 'em, brother! Quick!"

The startled rider of the bay, whose face had been turned away from Sim when the sharp command rang out, gathered the reins instinctively. Then he glanced quickly to his left, found himself gazing into the yawning black cavern of a .45's barrel and raised his hands above his head. Gideon Jersey had instantly sighted the bandaged

right arm, and he knew the reputation of the man who had robbed the gold messenger of the seventy-thousand-dollar brick. He realized that the time had come for him to be obedient.

"That's fine," commented Sim, walking slowly forward, wary eyes on his captive. "Keep 'em up, throw your leg over the cantle, and get off."

The man obeyed with the graceful movements of a veteran horseman.

"Face the horse, brother."

Gideon Jersey, hands still stretched aloft, obeyed the new command.

Sim stepped quickly forward. He tossed his six-shooter and caught it by the barrel. Shoulder high he held it, like a club. He had sized this man up in a twinkling. He was bad medicine. His foxy eyes had told Sim that he realized Sim's semi-helpless condition, which was the result of his broken arm. Sim knew that he would fly into action the moment he felt one of his six-shooters being drawn from its holster. He would realize that Sim could not keep him covered and at the same time withdraw one of his guns when he had only one arm to serve him. He was merely waiting, back to his captor, until he knew which gun Sim would jerk out first. Then he would grab the other one, whirl about, and shoot—nor would he miss.

Close to him, Simeon Fannan lifted his right foot. Steadying himself, he slipped the toe of it under the protruding butt of the heavy left-hand six-shooter. He raised it carefully until it was half an inch below it. Then a quick, well-gauged flip, and the big gun went flying from its holster and thudded on the ground.

Almost instantly Gideon Jersey dived for the other gun and wheeled. He had thought that Sim had used his hand to remove his left-hand weapon. So there was no help for it. Sim's clubbed revolver descended on the man's skull before his right-hand gun was clear of the holster; and Jersey sank with a low groan, straight downward, as his knees gave way beneath him.

First removing the remaining six-shooter from its holster, Sim bent over him. The man was breathing heavily, lips fluttering. Sim gently shook him, but there was no response. He turned him over and recognized him as a man he had seen watching him while he was playing solitaire in the Pioneer Dance Hall, the day after his return from San Francisco.

"Completely out," he remarked complacently. "Sorry, brother, but I had to do it."

He returned to the pawing black and led him forward. Into the saddle pockets he thrust Gideon Jersey's guns. He unbuckled a filled cartridge belt; it followed the weapons into the saddlebags. Sim lowered the reins of the outlaw's horse so that he would stand. Then once more making sure that the man was still unconscious, he bent and began a one-armed examination of his person. In a pocket of the man's fringed leather chaps Sim came upon the letter. The envelope had not been opened, proving that, though the letter was addressed to this man, supposedly, its contents were designed for the perusal of some one higher up.

Sim squatted; with his teeth he tore the envelope. He read in an illiterate scrawl:

DERE PETE: I made it with them all right to Nat dabneys and am writing you like you told me to. she must have faked the map she give Ed ayers for shes got another one herself. I heard her tell Ray that much. Ray suspicions me I think for him and the girl keep watching me all the while. If ray sees me writing this letter or mailing it he will probably try to find out who gets it. I forgot to say that I am writing this at Nat dabneys. I guess that is all. yours HERK.

Simeon Fannan read the letter several times, then placed it on the floor of the arroyo, struck a match, and burned it. Then he sat gazing at his

conquest. What was he to do with this man?

He remembered his horse, rose from his haunches, and, twisting out the cork of his canteen with his teeth, managed to wet the animal's mouth.

He bent over and examined the messenger again. He had seen him move slightly, and now, as he bent down, he heard muttered words. "Coming to, I guess," he said laconically.

He found a half-filled canteen of water on the saddle of the bay. He removed it and laid it in the sand beside the stricken outlaw. Then, believing that the man's horse would stand at least until the sandstorm swept across the desert, Sim mounted the black and rode off down the arroyo at a steady trot.

It was after dark when he reached the water hole where Kathleen's expedition had camped at two o'clock. Sim found plain evidences of their occupancy of the place. Clumsily he gave the horse a one-handed rubdown, washed out his mouth repeatedly, and allowed him to drink a little now and then. He wondered if Kathleen had plenty of provisions in her pack; for he had decided to ride on to her aid, knowing that she had an enemy in her party. There was not time to return to Dabney's for the pack-outfit he had meant to bring along.

In an hour, horse and man were greatly refreshed, though Sim, who had had no lunch, was hungry. With one-armed awkwardness he threw on the saddle—which he had removed so that the pores of the black's back could breathe—and mounted.

He rode hard again, headed for the Blacksmith's Anvil, which he knew would be the party's next camping place if they heeded his map. It was nine o'clock when he reached the spot, and the sandstorm was steadily growing in intensity. But nobody was there. Red coals of petrified yucca glowed, however, fanned to long life by the whistling wind.

He had passed John Ray in the night, which was made doubly dark by the clouds of sand that blew across his course.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE FIFTH OUTLAW ARRIVES.

IN the foothills of the San Anselmo Mountains, partially sheltered from the sandstorm by a growth of scrub piñon pines, four men sat about a camp fire and waited far into the night. The saddle horses and pack mules stood with their backs to the blast; their disconsolate heads were lowered till their muzzles almost touched the ground.

"That fella Jersey oughta showed up three hours ago," said little Patango Pete after a long space of silence.

"Yeah," drawled his older brother, Bottleneck Oshanter.

"What in thunder's keepin' 'im?" querulously demanded Ted Bagley.

While Aaron Claggett, the fourth member of the notorious Oshanter Gang, remarked, "Maybe he couldn't get this Hanger's note to-day, er sumpin like that."

Some such four-tongued dialogue had taken place among them at least a dozen times since they settled down in this spot to await the letter bearer's coming.

"They musta got to Nat Dabney's yistiddy," opined Bottleneck. "We followed their trail almost there, and they couldn't 'a' kept back after we struck out for the mountains. Then why didn't this Herk Hanger write his letter last night and git her in the mail box, so's Gid could pick 'er up to-day?"

"I ain't trustin' that ole fox, Nat Dabney, any too far," Patango Pete returned. "He never liked us boys a lot. If he knew what that jane had on her chest, he'd help her out."

"He wouldn't dare monkey with a letter in the mail," piped up Aaron Clag-

gett. "He'd hafta give it to Gid even if he was suspicious of 'im. No, I think everythin' went off all right so far as Gid's concerned. It's that fella Herk Hanger that's got me guessin'. Us fellas don't know enough about that lad to trust 'im with an important thing like this."

"What else could we do?" stormed little Pete petulantly. "That fella Ray, and maybe the girl, too, knows every one of us. We had to have Gid to get the note, didn't we, because Nat Dabney's never seen 'im? And we had to have this Herk Hanger go with the girl and Ray because they didn't know he's connected with us. We was helpless. We had to trust 'im. And I'm tellin' you I think he's O. K. He come to me with the best of recommendations from a fella me and Bottleneck knows well, down on the border. Anybody that ole Spike Heffner recommends is there. Eh, big brother?"

"Sure," replied Bottleneck, opening sleepy eyes. Bottleneck had had a hard time of it, by reason of his run-down condition following the blood transfusion. The long ride had about worn him out; and he wanted to sleep all the time, it seemed.

"Wake up, you!" sternly demanded Patango Pete. "Go selling your strength all over the country like you done and then expect to ride out here and do your dooty!"

"Gi'me a shot," pleaded the big fellow wearily. "Here I earned that thousan' berries, and not a cent of it did I git to spend. A thousan' dollars in my pocket, by golly, and Shanty Camp waitin' fer me to loosen up, and—here I am!"

Little Pete went to the pack and returned with a wicker demijohn. He poured out a generous drink in a tin cup and grudgingly passed it to his brother.

"One every hour's all you git," he solemnly prescribed. "An' the rest of us gits none until Gid Jersey shows up. This here's business, not a moonshine spree."

Claggett and Bagley sighed, but bowed to the edict of their diminutive but forceful leader.

The double-header that Pete had poured for his beloved brother revived that gentleman and rendered him slightly talkative.

"If only you'd been the one that went to the girl's cabin to git that map instead o' Ayers, Pete," he said. "You'd 'a' knowed right off that she'd faked the thing 'cause you know this country and Ayers don't. And while Ayers was bringin' the map for you to see, this jane got the chance to slip out with her ole mules. That's where you fell down, little brother."

"Aw, go chase yerself!" growled Patango Pete. "I couldn't do ever'thing, could I? Besides that, Madame Volga Van Norman and me was kinda pals, you understand. And I—well, I kinda took to the kid, in a way, and——"

"Yas, you poor simp!" taunted Bottleneck. "You fell fer her. I know! And maybe because o' that yieldin' heart o' yourn we'll lose out on this deal."

The quartette was tired, worried, argumentative.

"If it hadn't been fer me you'd never known anything about the darn' map," continued the now fully awake Bottleneck.

"Yes, you! You did a lot, didn't you? You let that girl git away with it. You didn't even chase her down the street after she stole it." This was bawled by Claggett.

"But I found out about it, didn't I?" argued Bottleneck. "And, anyway, it was because o' me that this poor boob of an Arlie got squeezed out. If I hadn't braced him, and the girl hadn't listened, and if——"

"Aw, forget that patter!" growled Claggett and immediately brought up another mooted subject among them.

"Neither you ner Pete even knows that this Fannan is the guy that stole the bar o' gold. You're only guessin'. And it may be that——"

"May be nothin'!" Patango Pete cut in. "Don't he answer the description? Didn't the notice say this fella that held up the gold messenger was slim an' blue-eyed and lean-lookin' in the face? And didn't Fannan bring in sharp-edged gold and give some to the girl? And didn't she offer it to Ayers? And didn't Ayers show it to me? And didn't——"

"Listen! Listen!" came the sharp warning from Ted Bagley. "I hear a hoss a-comin', I think." And after a pause, Ted said: "By golly, a bunch of 'em! Git ready, boys! We don't know what this may mean."

From close at hand now came a hail. "Hey! Who's there by the fire? Is it the Oshanters?"

"By gosh, if it ain't that dumb-bell, Herk Hanger!" ejaculated Pete, springing to his feet. "Now what?" He lifted his voice in answer. "That you, Herk?"

"Sure!" came the proud reply. "I'm comin' in."

The four charter members of the Oshanter Gang were on their feet, curious, expectant. The shuffle of many hoofs in the soft sand came closer. The eyeballs of the animals gleamed in the camp-fire light. Then Kathleen Dancy rode in on her mule, closely followed by the grinning Herk. Behind them labored a string of mules and horses, all heavily packed.

"Well, fer the love o' Mike!" gasped Patango Pete, gazing in wonder at the haggard girl. "What's all this?"

"Help her off, Pete," advised Herk. "She's about all in. You oughta be out in that sandstorm. Boy!"

Patango Pete and Claggett jumped to help the exhausted girl to the ground. She wilted before them.

"Shucks!" growled Pete compassionately. "That ain't no way to treat her. Bottleneck, git that booze. Maybe she'll take a sip er two. Do you good, Madame Volga. Now, you"—he swung about and fixed a stern eye on Herk Hanger—"what d'you mean by this? And how in thunder'd you git here anyway, I'd like to know?"

Hanger, at first flushed with pride over his achievement, looked downcast. "I had my compass," he explained. "I located that tall pine you sent word to me about—located her yistiddy and got a line on her. Your note said you'd camp clost to it, didn't it? So all I had to do, after the storm come on, was to look at my compass now and then. And, when we gits into the foothills, I sees your light."

"But what're you doin' here?"

"You might gi'me a shot o' that booze, too," suggested Herk. "Then maybe I c'n tell you better."

Kathleen had consented to several sips of whisky and water, which immediately revived her. With the curious eyes of the four outlaws upon her, she sat at one side trying to rearrange her hair. She was numb, dizzy, and scarcely knew whether she was awake or dreaming. It all seemed like a horrid nightmare. For hours and hours Hanger had forced her on through the driving sand. She was bewildered, utterly worn out. She heard Herk's voice explaining all about it, but the words meant little to her. Her hands dropped twice from her hair; she had fallen asleep sitting erect.

"Get Madame Van Norman some blankets an' things," commanded Patango Pete in the midst of Hanger's recital. "Let her git some rest."

Two men hastened to do his bidding. They wrapped the blankets about the girl, and she lay down just where she was. The warming whisky lulled her immediately into the dreamless sleep of complete exhaustion.

"And you say she claims she give

the map to Ray?" demanded Pete of Hanger.

The blond newcomer into the Oshanter Gang nodded emphatically.

Patango Pete fell silent, his big black Stetson pushed to the back of his bullet head. "That's about what she'd do, all right," he said finally. "Course, if she was dependin' on Ray to lead the outfit, she'd give 'im the map. But you oughta got Ray instid o' her, Herk."

Hanger squirmed. "I didn't know about that ole bird," he explained. "He kep' watchin' me like a hawk; and he's got a sincere eye, I'll tell the world! I didn't know but he might be heeled, even though he didn't display any hardware in his show window. Anyway, I didn't take a chanct.

"You see, I wasn't sure whether he was aimin' to beat it back to Dabney's to-night er not. But when I knew he'd slipped away from me, I thought the next best thing to do was to swipe the girl. I thought she had the map. And, after I'd made my crack and let her know I was with you boys, I hadta go on an' finish the thing, didn't I? So here she is. You c'n hold her and git in touch with Ray. He'll give up the map to git us to turn the dame loose."

"That sounds like good medicine to me," observed Ted Bagley; while Bottleneck and Claggett nodded their approval.

Little Patango Pete, however, shook his knotty head. "I'm mighty sorry this here thing happened," he stated. "I was appointed that there girl's protector, and I ain't never throwed up my job."

"Aw, bunk!" scoffed his brother.

Pete shot a glance at him. "You close your face!" he ordered between his teeth. "I'm a-runnin' this outfit, ain't I?"

He fell silent. "But now we got her," he added finally, "I reckon we better hang onto her till Ray comes through with the map. Can't do nothin' else with her, in fact, unless we turn her loose on the desert. And that would be plumb murder." He rose to his feet. "Well," he declared, "we can't do nothin' till mornin', anyway. Then one of us'll try to pump her and find out what she done to that map she give Ayers. One of us'll have to stay awake and see that she don't come to and try to make a break—you, Bagley. The rest of us c'n git some sleep. But where in thunder's that Gid Jersey?"

"He c'n rot for all we care," exclaimed Ted Bagley, "now't Herk has come and told us even more'n he wrote in his letter to Pete."

To be continued in the next issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

GLACIER PARK RAVAGED BY FIRE

OF the many severe forest fires that devastated vast areas of timberland throughout the West during the past summer, one of the most destructive was that which ravaged a large area of the Glacier National Park, in Northern Montana. This has been designated as the worst forest fire in the history of the Glacier Park. Hundreds of fire fighters were employed to get the big blaze under control, and Superintendent Horace Albright, of Yellowstone Park, was called in to take command of the fire-fighting forces. The main fire area is reported to have covered some thirty-eight thousand acres, and old-time residents of the Park claim that the winds prevailing were the worst in their experience. The fires did not materially affect tourist travel, as the fire-swept region was one that visitors do not frequent.

The Phantom Piute

By Ray Humphreys

Author of "His 'Dumb' Partner," etc.

IT was only natural that "Bud" Stewart, deputy sheriff of Conejos, more noted for daring than tact, more reckless than wise, should chaff and fret at the delay in the capture of the "Phantom Piute," an Indian road agent who had spread a reign of terror through the San Isabel country. Bud knew, as every one in Conejos did, that Sheriff Luke Parslow had done his mightiest to trap the wily phantom rider; but every effort had been in vain—now another ore stage had been held up on the Leadville road by the wary Indian outlaw.

It seemed as though ore stages were the red raider's favorites. And that was strange; for the chests of high-grade stuff that the stages carried down to the smelters were not easily handled, and their contents were not easily turned into money. Seldom did the Phantom Piute, so named because he rode and robbed shrouded in a white mask and cloak, bother passengers in the stages; but often the terror struck at isolated ranch houses, and then he showed mercy to none. Several murders, several cases of arson, and innumerable holdups and burglaries were charged to his account.

"That Phantom Piute ain't near as clever as you hombres give him credit fer," Bud Stewart had said off in the Conejos post office as news of the Piute's latest crime had reached town. "He's just got an awful lot o' nerve, that's all; an' like as not he has a whole fistful o' confederates, aiders an' abettors among them Injuns up Indian Hills way who hide him out, give us wrong information, and help him give the law the merry ha, ha!"

"Speakin' o' nerve, Bud," exclaimed "Rabbit" Tarvin, the Conejos postmaster, who was slightly peeved at the

sheriff and all the sheriff's forces for their failure to nab the man who was raising a ruction with the mails in his stage robberies, "you was always tooted fer havin' considerable nerve yourself. Why don't you go out an' bring that Phantom bird in single-handed. I'll betcha you could do it, Bud!"

If the deputy sheriff noticed the slight tinge of sarcasm in the postmaster's voice, he passed it over. "I might do that little thing some o' these days," said Bud impatiently; "would of tried it before exceptin' that the Phantom's raidin' grounds is mighty big fer one man to cover!"

It was then that a bright-eyed, brown-haired girl, who had been listening to the discussion, stepped up to Bud; and at sight of her Bud quickly took off his sombrero.

"How do you do, Miss Lederle?" said the deputy. "Ain't it too bad that the Phantom has held up the stage ag'in, an' Rabbit says thar ain't no mail fer nobody to-day?"

"It is too bad that some one doesn't put a stop to the Phantom," she replied; and the insinuation was not lost on Bud. Taking her by the arm, he propelled her through the crowd and out of the shack that served as post office, and then he confided in her.

"I'm goin' after that hombre—myself!" he whispered.

"When?"

"I dunno—fust chance I get to sneak off," replied Bud; and then he launched into a torrent of explanations. The Phantom, he said, was just lucky and probably had a lot of help in escaping and hiding away. Sheriff Parslow, he averred, was too busy with other important matters to spare the time to go after the robber in the right way; and posses were forever wearying of too strenuous riding. Hence, it seemed to Bud, he said, that he might elect himself to make a successful hunt for the Piute.

"That Injun is makin' his headquarters in Injun Hills, sure," went on Bud; "and that's rough country up thar."

The girl—Helene Lederle—looked at him with questioning eyes as though she doubted that.

"Then you think that the Phantom Piute is really an Indian and not a white man masquerading as a red man?"

That was a new one on Bud. He hesitated, struck by the possibility of the thing, but he finally found words in answer. "No," he said. "I think he's an Injun!"

After that conversation with the girl, Bud began to do a lot of thinking. There might be an explanation of the Piute's identity in Helene's question, he decided. Perhaps the Phantom Piute was a white man, and one who might be mingling openly with honest folks at those intervals he wasn't out raiding. The more he thought of that the more certain he became that that angle of the matter would bear investigation. And then, like a thunderbolt out of a clear sky came an idea that set Bud's heart to pounding.

"A white man masquerading as an Injun!" he exclaimed; "why not a deputy sheriff masquerading as a Phantom Piute?"

Bud said nothing to Sheriff Luke Parslow, nor to the girl, Helene, about his plans. It was difficult to keep them from the latter who seemed to be unusually interested in the Phantom Piute and Bud's determination to catch him. The girl, who had come to Conejos only a few months before, had hardly noticed Bud until the day of his outbreak in the post office; but since that time she had cultivated the deputy, and that was not displeasing to Stewart.

"A dern purty gal," he told himself; "an', ef I had time, I might fall head over heels in love with her. I guess me blowing off how I was to ketch the Phantom kinda impressed her, that's

all; but I reckon I better make good my boast on that fust chance I gets!"

The opportunity that Bud had long awaited came in a few days when Sheriff Parslow asked his deputy to ride down to the Indian Hills country with a subpœna for a rancher in that vicinity, wanted as a witness in a cattle case in Conejos court. Bud departed in haste, and without seeing the girl; although he had purposely ridden past her home to say good-by to her. In his slicker, on his saddle, he carried a white cloak and mask such as the Phantom Piute was said to wear. It had not been difficult to get a description of the Piute's garb, since at least twenty residents of Conejos had seen the raider at more or less close range. They had been passengers at different times that the robber held up the stage.

"I got it figured," Bud said to his horse, as he rode away from Conejos, "that I kin get me a good line on this Phantom hombre as soon as I hit Injun Hills. He always rides a bay hoss, they say; and I got a bay. An', by slippin' on this snowy shroud an' the mask, under my sombrero, I guess I kin pass as him. An' then I'll see what hombres are willin' to give me a welcome down thar."

Bud laughed.

"Ef I kin nab one o' the Phantom's confederates, mebbe I can squeeze enough information outta him, under pressure, to give the whole works away; and then—good-by, Phantom!"

Such an achievement, Bud realized, would be epoch making in Conejos; for the Phantom Piute had terrorized the countryside for a number of years, long before either Sheriff Luke Parslow or Bud had come into power. But of late the rider had been unusually active, and the peaceful citizens of the community were beginning to murmur that the law wasn't functioning as it should.

"Gimme half a chance," grunted Bud grimly, "an' I'll show 'em the fastest hand old John Law ever played in these parts!"

It was a little past noon, that day, when Bud reached his destination and served the subpœna on the rancher who was wanted as a witness in the Conejos court. The rancher promised to be on hand, in town, the day the trial was to open; and then he launched into a tirade against the sheriff.

"Seems to me," the rancher remarked bitterly, "that some o' you fellers would come up this way oftener an' try to run that dern Phantom Piute to his hole! I've seen him twice now—flashing down that trail, yonder, in his robes; an' I'm thinkin' it's only a question o' time until he'll be stoppin' off here to rob me. I'll give him a hot reception ef he comes square an' aboveboard, but like as not he'll come in the night or when my back's turned."

"He's been on the road yonder, eh?"

"Yep; twice—and both times in the last month," said the rancher; "an' he's always hurryin'. The last time I sees him it was the day the Leadville stage was held up on the Bear Creek road!"

Bud Stewart whistled. "That's a good tip, mister," he told the rancher, "an' mebbe that'll help git him. I'll see what I kin do."

"Ef it ain't any more than you have done, it won't be much," said the rancher, as Bud rode away. But the remark was not made loud enough for the departing deputy to hear; and, anyway, Stewart was too busy with his thoughts then to give heed to him.

Once on the road, Bud turned his horse and rode quietly until he was out of sight of the ranch; then he plunged into the timber. "Now, ol' hoss," he said excitedly, as he dismounted and pulled off the saddle, "you an' me is goin' to do a little actin', an' that saddle ain't part of the scenery. That Phantom Piute, they say, ain't using a saddle none; so neither are we. But we are using this——"

And from the slicker roll Bud uncovered the white garment that he had brought along. It was hardly more than a sheet. He wrapped it around himself, then reached down and took a white mask from the slicker roll. He donned that, too. Then he pulled his sombrero down so that the mask and hat met. He seemed perfectly disguised. He mounted with some difficulty, due to the whirling of his horse, who had no liking for the ghostly appearance of its rider. Once on, Bud carefully tucked the cloak in on both sides. He made certain that he could get to his gun in a hurry, and then he rode out on the road.

"I'll go tearin' through them Injun settlements an' see ef I don't git a high sign from some one," decided Bud; "an', ef I meet the Phantom hisself, I reckon he'll be too surprised to beat me to the draw—seein' another Phantom face to face in his own huntin' ground."

It was quite far up the road to the nearest Indian homes, however; so Bud held his horse to a trot until he came in sight of the first of the adobes. Then he let the pony take its head. He flashed up the road, to be immediately heralded by a dozen barking dogs. Heads popped out of the adobes but were as quickly withdrawn. One Indian, trudging along behind a gray burro loaded with greasewood, took one look at the approaching rider, and then turned and ran.

Once beyond the Indian settlement, Bud pulled his pony to a walk again. He had certainly not been a welcome sight to those redskins.

Twice, after that, Bud repeated his trick of tearing through small Piute settlements; but he received no homage or friendly sign. The dogs barked him on his way; a few reds stole glances at him; but that was all. Perhaps, after all, Bud decided, his plan would not work out as he desired. He was beginning to penetrate the upper Indian Hills when he heard the thud of hoof beats ahead. He put the spurs to his own horse, determined to meet the oncoming rider in manner befitting the Phantom Piute's approved mode of traveling—at a gallop.

Turning a bend in the road, Bud saw an Indian approaching on a pinto pony. But at that instant the Indian saw Bud. With a yell the Indian held up a hand and jerked his pony to a halt. Bud followed suit. Then, in rapid gutturals, the Indian spoke—making feverish signs in the direction from which Bud had just come. The deputy could only nod; for the Indian's words tumbled out too quickly, one on the other, for him to comprehend, and he dared not risk speaking himself.

Suddenly the Indian turned and flashed back up the road, and Bud followed. A mile or so was covered before the Indian swerved off onto a trail, and Bud did likewise. Once in the cover of the timber the Indian stopped and gave him another lecture, pointed on up the trail, and then turned and galloped off, the way they had just come. But Bud was satisfied. Here, indeed, was a friend of the Phantom's; and, judging only from the Indian's demeanor, he had been warning the Phantom to seek cover as quickly as possible on up the trail.

"Mebbe I should have nabbed that feller and taken him in and sweated him a bit," thought Bud; "but then, he's an Injun, an' he'd probably hold out until spring afore he'd break. An' mebbe he don't know much, anyhow. All I got to go on is that he didn't seem surprised to see me at all; therefore, he must be friendly with the Phantom, an' my disguise must be all hunky-dory at that."

Chuckling, then, Bud forced his horse along the trail; and in a few minutes came out on a grassy slope that fell away toward a narrow cañon. The trail led there; and Bud followed, only

to pull up his horse in a hurry as he saw a saddled sorrel partly hidden in a growth of aspens part way down the slope. Then he saw something that startled him much more.

On a point of the rocky entrance, guarding the cañon, sat a woman; and Bud needed no second look to tell him that it was Helene Lederle and that she was armed with a rifle, which she was holding at alert. For a minute Bud hesitated, and then light dawned on him. No wonder this pretty girl, a stranger in Conejos, had been interested in his efforts to catch the Phantom Piute. She must be a confederate, or a spy, for the outlaw. Bud's first impulse was to shout at her; but he realized that whatever he had so far gained would be lost at that and that it might be better to attempt to pass her and go on into the cañon, hoping that she would not discover that he was a pseudo Piute. He urged the pony forward and he saw the girl get to her feet, rifle ready, and scrutinize him.

"Ef I only knew how to imitate that dang Piute's voice," groaned Bud, "I might try it; but I don't dare risk that!"

So, to pacify the watcher on the cliff, Bud waved an airy gesture to her and rode straight into the cañon. He watched her, out of the corner of one eye, and decided that she was satisfied; for she had seated herself again where Bud had first spied her.

"Huh!" groaned Bud, as he rode up the cañon, "guess I ain't progressin' nice, eh? An' that was the gal I was kinda gettin' interested in, too—a dern little spy fer the Phantom. It was her said mebbe the Phantom was a white man. Waal, he probably is a white man ef she's aidin' him."

But Bud didn't continue; for ahead of him, fifty yards or so up the cañon, frowned a big cave that looked anything but inviting. It was large enough for a mounted man to enter, but Bud hesitated and pulled the pony to a stop.

"No use in us goin' in thar, hoss," said Bud; "fer we'd be at the mercy of any one thar, ef thar was some one thar. I'm thinkin' thar ain't. That gal wouldn't be waitin' out thar, an' that Injun wouldn't have shooed me up the trail if the Phantom was in the cave. Nope, he's out; an' my best bet is——"

The deputy scanned the walls of the cañon with rising hope. They were not as steep as they appeared, on first glance, and he might be able to pick his way out.

"Ef we can get out, hoss," he went on, "we'll beat it fer town; we'll get the boss an' a posse, an' come back here, an' round up the whole dog-gone shebang. It ain't no use in me blunderin' on alone, seein' I'll git credit fer findin' the layout even ef I do git a little help on the pinch; an' anyhow I ain't hankerin' to—to tell that gal that she's under arrest. Nope, I ain't!"

Dismounting, Bud picked a way through the bushes that fringed the bottom of the cañon. Once past these he found easier going, and the pony had no difficulty in following at his heels. Zigzagging this way and that, Bud managed to reach a hillock that was almost directly over the mouth of the cave. Keeping a sharp eye down the cañon, to be sure that the girl didn't come along and catch him escaping in that manner, Bud eventually dropped out of sight on the far slope of the hill. He mounted then, and rode down toward a road that was visible in the distance. As he neared it he saw that it was the Bear Creek pike—the favorite raiding ground for the Phantom Piute.

"No wonder," mused Bud; "all he has to do is shoot up this hill, an' scud down the other side, an' he's home. Funny no one thought to look fer caves; now me——" For a moment Bud thought of discarding his disguise, but he put that idea away quickly. "I'm still in enemy territory," he decided; "an' I may get some more folks involved

in this thing before I'm through. No, I'll keep these dang things on fer a while yit!"

Dropping rapidly down the hill, Bud was soon on the Bear Creek pike; and he turned the pony's head down the road, toward Conejos, laughing to himself at the ease with which he had located the bandit's hide out, after the sheriff and every one else had searched for it so long in vain.

"Good thing the ol' Phantom hisself was out, though," muttered Bud, "or else I might have run into a hail o' lead from that gal's rifle. But mebbe she guards that joint only when the Phantom is out earnin' the daily bread. Wonder whar he is to-day, anyhow?"

Then, with a glance at the sun, which warned him that he had no time to lose, Bud put the spurs to the bay pony and tore down the pike, his white robe streaming out behind him. He had but one thought and that was to reach Conejos as soon as possible and organize a posse to return and catch the bandit red-handed.

Flashing around a bend in the road, Bud catapulted headlong into a group of riders that opened to receive him, automatically, and then closed in on him.

"Put up your hands!"

"Reckon we got you, Piute!"

"Git off that hoss right now!"

The demands all came at once; and, at the same time, the riders managed to bring threatening six-guns into sight. They had been taken by surprise; but so had Bud, for that matter—and Bud had not even thought of going for his gun.

"Waal, what about it?" asked Bud suddenly.

"Oh, so you can talk English?" boomed a big voice that Bud recognized immediately as that of his own boss, Sheriff Luke Parslow. The next instant Parslow was in front of the masked rider. "Mebbe you ain't a Piute after all, mister. Tear off that dang mask before I shoot it off of you!"

Sputtering, Bud snatched away the mask.

"Bud Stewart, of all men!"

"Why, it's your own deputy, Parslow!"

"Waal, no wonder we could never ketch the Phantom!"

And then a bedlam broke loose while Bud tried to explain, but the posse was hard of hearing when it came to listening to Bud. The sheriff himself, however, could not help but gloat a little bit over the capture of the long-wanted Phantom.

"When we heard that you had burned them hay stacks on Bear Creek an' then looted the ranch homes while everybody was fightin' the fires we came hot footin' it up here hard as we could come. An' here we run right into you; but why in tarnation, Bud, did it have to be you?"

"It ain't," cried Bud miserably, and then he stumbled through his story of his attempt to masquerade as the Phantom Piute to locate the real bandit. The explanation didn't satisfy the sheriff, nor the posse. The story was laughed down.

"You say you found his cave, eh?" demanded Parslow. "Waal, then, I reckon we'll look it over; his cave or your cave, Bud, it should have plenty o' loot in it!"

"Whar is this dern cave?" demanded a posse man.

"It's on th' Indian Hills road," began Bud unhappily; "we kin go back up a ways an' over the mountain——"

"We kin take that short cut through Eddie Owens' ranch," said the sheriff; "and that'll land us in Injun Hills afore dark. An' mind you, Bud, no trickery!"

It was a hilarious posse that passed through the Owens' holdings a few minutes later, and then trotted up the Indian Hills trails. They passed the

Indian villages, and the sight of the robed but unmasked Phantom Piute in the midst of a bunch of horsemen caused a furor in the villages. But Bud did not see the Indian who had guided him to the trail originally. When they came to the trail to the cañon Bud pointed it out, his hopes rose with the thought that perhaps the real Phantom Piute was in the cañon and would be cornered. Bud told the posse of the girl at the cañon mouth.

"Helene Lederle!" exclaimed the sheriff. "Humph—I might have known she was in with you. I saw you two makin' a fuss over each other recently; but she seemed like such a nice little gal."

"She is," said Bud miserably, in defense of the girl, despite the fact that he knew she must have been aiding the Piute.

"Thar she is!" cried a posse man, finally; and, sure enough, the girl was still visible on the rocks. At the approach of the posse she stood up, rifle in hands; and then Sheriff Parslow shouted at her to come down at once. She came, hurriedly, but retaining her rifle.

"What's the idear?" asked Parslow.

"He's in thar, the Phantom Piute," said the girl. "I shot him as he went in, an' I was waitin' to see if he dared come out. That's all; an' I'm so glad you've come!"

But instead of praise came unexpected laughter.

"Purty good, missie," said the sheriff, "you think fast. But here's your Phantom Piute friend, an' he ain't shot. We caught him red-handed, an' it looks to me like you an' him were sort o' pals in this raidin' business—you standin' guard——"

The girl paled at sight of Bud.

"I went in, yes," began Bud miserably; but he got no farther. The girl grabbed Sheriff Parslow by the arm. "The Phantom Piute is in thar, in that cave," she cried; "an' he's shot. Go in an' get him, sheriff—please!"

The sheriff assumed a wise air. "Four men stay here with these two," he ordered, "an' the rest o' you come along with me. We'll look in that cave, anyhow—tho' it's gettin' dusk. Come on."

Bud looked at Helene and she looked at him, but neither said a word. There was nothing to be said, it seemed to Bud.

In almost a twinkling, however, the sheriff was heard to shout; and, in a few moments, the posse came back, supporting a tall Indian, garbed in a blood-stained white robe, and with a dirty white mask hanging around his neck.

"That's him" said the girl dramatically; "I'd know him in a million Indians. He's the man who shot and killed my father on Buffalo Creek last fall. I've been gunning fer him since, afraid all the time that some one else would get him before I paid him my debt of revenge."

The sheriff looked at Helene, then at Stewart. "Great Guns, Bud!" he exclaimed, "I'm sorry; but your story sounded so far-fetched that we just couldn't swallow it. Lucky enough Miss Lederle got the right man here, for otherwise things might look bad fer you. Forgive me, Bud."

They shook hands.

And then, in the gathering dusk, Stewart turned to Helene, who had just asked that her sorrel be brought out of the aspens. "I'll git him fer you, Helene," said Bud eagerly; "but tell me, how did you git the right man? How come you didn't shoot me, ef you were waitin' here fer the Phantom? I rode in, pretendin' to be him, an' mistakin' you fer one of his confederates."

"You waved at me," said the girl, simply; "and it was a white hand. I knew the man I wanted was an Injun, so I thought at once that you was attemptin' to catch the Phantom. An'

then when the Phantom really did come, after you had gone in, I had to fire at him for fear that he'd find you in thar and kill you."

Bud gulped. "Lucky you bored him through the shoulder," he murmured. "That kept him from comin' fer you. An' me all the time thinkin' you was a spy fer the Phantom Piute! Gee whiz, Helene, ef you can ever fergive me, I'll promise always to believe——"

"Yes," said the girl, as Bud took her hands in his.

"Weddin' bells," said Sheriff Luke Parslow, laconically; "but meanwhile, let's start home—it's gettin' dark!"

SUN DANCE ON FORT HALL RESERVATION

FOR the first time in four years, the Indians of the Shoshone and Bannock tribes performed their Sun Dance on the Fort Hall reservation, beginning at sunrise on July 17th. Prior to the dance, Indians from all corners of the reservation gathered at the Big Bend of the Portneuf River, about ten miles west of Pocatello, Idaho, the place selected for the ceremony. Some came in autos, others afoot, but many redskins traveled on horseback or in dilapidated wagons.

The dance was under the supervision of the high priests of the two tribes. It lasts three days, and during that time no food is permitted to pass the lips of the dancers. Water, made pure by the sun god, is sparingly allowed. The dancers are not allowed to rest, but must dance continuously.

The Sun Dance has been the subject of considerable opposition on the part of government and missionary bodies, so that of late years it has been performed, if at all, with less of the original ceremonials, and in a modified form. Many of the Indian tribes who formerly held the dance have abandoned it for this reason. Others have made it into a spectacle for the sake of gain, rather than the great religious tribal ceremony that it was in former days.

When this famous dance was being performed without molestation by the Indians of the Western plains, it usually lasted eight days. There was a preliminary period of secret rituals, prior to the performance that could be witnessed by outsiders. These secret ceremonies were held in a special tepee and consisted of smoking, praying, feasting, and the preparation of objects to be worn in the public performance or used on the altar. Toward the end of the secret rites, the Indians prepared the great lodge for the public ritual to follow. This lodge would vary from a roofless inclosure with a tall center pole, to a partially covered structure of forked uprights connected by cross bars, from which rafter poles extended to the fork of the center pole. This type of lodge might vary from sixty to one hundred feet in diameter.

When the Sun Dance lodge is completed, the altar is erected on its western side. This may be a simple buffalo skull and pipe on a cleared circle of earth or a much more elaborate affair.

When the altar is ready, the dancers are decorated with sage and willow wreaths about the head, waist, neck, wrists, and ankles, and their almost naked bodies are painted. They then form in line and dance toward the center pole, which represents the sun, all the while blowing whistles made of the wing bones of eagles as accompaniment to the ceremonial songs rendered by musicians seated around a large drum.

In most of the tribes practicing this dance, the ceremonies were accompanied by various forms of self-torture and laceration, and for this reason the rites came into disfavor with the white authorities.

Fifty-seven Flat

By Frank Richardson Pierce

Author of "Jewels of the Valley," etc.

IT was with concern that "Plush" Fuller examined his bank book. "Fifty thousand bucks, eh? Well, that's just half what it was when the racing season started. Somebody's going to get a trimming and get it soon. I'm too well known in these parts. I can't speak any foreign languages, so I can't migrate; Australia is too far away, so that leaves British Columbia, Yukon Territory, and Alaska where my exceptional talents are practically unknown."

Not through any accident was Fuller called "Plush." Somebody once said the dapper young man lived a plush-lined existence, and the name clung to him. He was rather proud of the title, for it was a tribute to his skill at trimming the honest and unwary individuals who came in contact with him from time to time.

But in selecting the horse's nose on which to bet money Plush had displayed poor judgment during the racing season. His expenses had been heavy, and he had consistently picked a loser. Twice he had framed races, and each time it had cost him twenty-five thousand dollars. The single time in which he shot square he won thirty thousand, but it went the way of the other money. Men no longer trusted him, nor did he blame them. On the other hand he insisted there was "one born every minute." It thus followed there were boobs in the world, somewhere. It was up to Plush to find them.

Following a long-established policy, a press-clipping bureau supplied him with clippings of sporting events in various parts of the United States, British Columbia, Alaska and Mexico. He was mostly interested in horse racing, but knew, for example, all about the Nome Sweepstakes in which the skill and endurance of man and dog were

pitted against the elements and each other. He knew fortunes changed hands and that there was a chance for a big "clean up" if a man worked it right, but Nome seemed cold and distant. To reach Nome meant days of hardship on either steamer or overland trail. Plush Fuller loved ease, warmth, and comfort. He loved to press a button and have a man magically appear to wait on him. He loved the bright lights and pretty women. Some day, when he made his big clean-up, he was going to marry a pretty woman. Nancy Devoe was her name. Nancy was born to furs and luxury. When a man courted Nancy it was not difficult to "shoot" four or five thousand dollars a month.

There were dog-racing events in various parts of the North, he noted after a careful examination of the clippings. He shook his head. "Too far in the future; too far away! Here's one about men who race up a mountain and back again—nothing in that!" The clipping went into a waste basket, but five minutes later he was examining the basket's contents. Eventually he recovered the clipping and read it over again. Scribbled in pencil at the top was a notation stating the item was clipped from the Cold Deck *Nugget.* A later item, also from the *Nugget,* stated that nearly fifty thousand dollars had changed hands the previous year on the mountain race. "That's getting into small change," he said thoughtfully; "with a little jazzing up the hardy miners might loosen up to the tune of a hundred thousand dollars if the proposition was tempting."

Plush Fuller's next move was to consult a little red book containing names and addresses of people in various parts of the world. Whenever Plush met a man who might prove of value, or a woman with a pretty face, he obtained the address if possible. "Ah, old Bill Hough! I remember him, whiskers a yard long; handy with a gun; ex-cowboy; ex-railroad man; ex-everything except convict! Great memory, too!"

Plush busied himself on the telephone and in time got the old sour dough on the wire. "Plush Fuller speaking, Bill. You'll remember me, perhaps?"

"Darned tootin' I remember you! You got me the job at the courthouse polishing chairs and doorknobs. Thankee kindly, sir. Anything I can do for you?" The old-timer was eager to square accounts for a favor performed with a motive back of it.

"I'm sending my car over, Bill. Climb in and make yourself at home. I'll have a little something for you when you arrive!"

And when Hough had smacked his lips over the "little something" and eased his long arms and legs, Plush Fuller said simply: "Give me the details of this foot race they have up the mountain back of Cold Deck, Bill!"

"Well, it's like the Fourth of July on a small scale. Pay Dirt Day, they call it—celebratin' the day pay was struck at Cold Deck. They hold a ceremony and speeches at Discovery claim, then have sports. Baseball, boxin', tug-o-war between teams from mines, and fin'ly the race up Mount Meehan. The mountain is named after 'Flapjack' Meehan, one of the two men who struck pay at Cold Deck. The other fellow is his pardner, 'Tubby' Willows. They're rich cusses, got a big mine, restaurant called the New Deal Café."

"Ah, yes, the New Deal Café," Plush interrupted. "Much money change hands over the outcome?"

"Well, nothing like the Nome dog race; but each year they get more excited over it. The miners have their fav'rite and back him to the limit. Now a dog race you can only see the start and finish, but the race up Mount Mee-

han can be seen all the way. You said suthin' about money. Figger it out. Eight or ten thousand men, counting trappers, miners on pay rolls and prospectors—each with money to blow and darned few things to blow it on! Naturally a lot of it goes on the men in the race. Say, you're not thinkin' o' goin' up to Cold Deck? I'll give you letters to Flapjack, and he'll start you right!"

"Oh, no!" Plush spoke lightly. He had no desire to herald his approach with letters of introduction, least of all to substantial citizens. Then, as easily as he had summoned the sour dough he got rid of him. Plush saw the possibilities at a glance. Miners with plenty of money, a holiday, an interesting race between men up a mountain, money wagered on the outcome! "My dish and I'll have it served on a silver tray," he cried; "no, they'll serve it to me on a golden tray this time."

Again he consulted the little book and this time sent for another individual who arrived shortly before midnight. "What's up, Plush?" he demanded.

"How's your wind and legs, 'Rabbit'?"

"My wind and legs would be all right if I had something to put in my stomach!" Rabbit answered.

"Think you could run to the top of a mountain and back?"

Rabbit appeared to be puzzled. He was a chunky individual with powerful legs and a deep chest. As a Marathon runner he had received considerable fame and a comfortable fortune. And he had formed the mistaken idea that Marathon running would prove popular for all time to come and that for the same period he would be in the money. Thus far he had not been able to bring himself down to work. His swift legs had given him the name Rabbit. His real name was Watson.

Plush repeated the query: "Think you could run to the top of a mountain and back?"

"If there's a square meal at the top, I'll be the first up. I can fall back if I have to." Rabbit spoke half seriously. "If I don't do something quick I'll have to work for a living, and I hate work. I've been feeling sick lately, and I think it's the thought of going to work. It unnerves me. Ever feel that way?"

"Occasionally. Now let's be serious. Here's the plan. You head for Cold Deck at once. I'll foot the bills. Take a Russian or Swede-sounding name and get a job in the mines. When the time is ripe, just declare yourself a candidate for the Mount Meehan Marathon. Get the low-down on what the others are doing; satisfy yourself you can beat any of them; I'll do the rest."

"You'll come North with your gang and cover all bets?"

"Exactly!"

"It's a cinch!"

"If it wasn't I wouldn't be doing it!"

"What do I get for my part?"

"Expenses. If you lose, nothing. If you win, I'll give you fifteen per cent of the clean-up. Fair enough?"

"Fair enough. Don't worry about me not winning. If I'm not a cinch I won't run. There's not a chance in the world of those boobs recognizing me as Rabbit Watson, is there? They have newspapers up there, don't they? Come to think of it my fame might——"

Plush laughed loudly. "You overestimate your fame, Rabbit. Those gold miners live in their own circle, and they don't know there is any more to the world than Alaska. Occasionally they come out, look around, get scared at the traffic, and hurry back. I've been reading the papers, and they are a scream. If the 'Mushing Kid' finds a nugget they give him a headline. A trapper comes in with a few pelts and

gets a write up. But, if there's a smash in the subway or a new president is elected in Mexico, they give it a line, no more. Let's dope out a name because from now on we don't know each other. I'll give you your cut right after the race, see. I'll give you expense money now. You write me three weeks before the race, giving full details. Understand?"

"Yeah. Say, how's this for a name —Stanislas Kupoff? I read a name like that in a Russian story, once. Guess I'll call myself Stan Kupoff for short, or I might get tangled up telling my own name. Say, do they have to work hard in the mines?"

"Some of them do, Rabbit; but you can side-step that. That's up to you. The main thing is for you to make 'em believe you are one of them. But don't overdo it and have the gang all wanting to bet on you. I guess that's all. Just a minute, I'll write a check."

"Do you cash pay checks here?" The man was somewhat soiled, resembling a miner on Saturday night who had not had the time to shift into his "best" clothes.

Flapjack Meehan's cashier glanced sharply at the man, then at the check. "Is your name Stanislas Kupoff?" she inquired.

"Yes ma'am!"

"Have Mr. Meehan O. K. the check, and I'll cash it. After to-night you won't have to go through that red tape!" She smiled, an impartial smile that disarmed possible resentment.

Kupoff, otherwise Rabbit Watson, slipped into Flapjack's office. He had already viewed the tall sour dough from afar, had heard much concerning his square-shooting methods and that he was chairman of the Pay Dirt Day celebration committee. Guilty of conscience, he did not relish too close an acquaintance with Flapjack. "Can I get this cashed?" he inquired.

"Kupoff, eh?" Flapjack read the name and glanced sharply at the man. "Kupoff! Russian?"

"Yea, my mother and father came from the old country. I grew up Outside!"

"That so?" The way Flapjack said it meant nothing at all. He gave the man a second searching look, then wrote O. K. on the check. When Kupoff had departed Flapjack turned to his partner. "Ever see that cuss before?"

"Never laid eyes on him," Tubby answered.

"Well, I've seen him or his picture," Flapjack answered; "but I can't place him."

Two weeks passed, and nothing more exciting happened than a ball game between rival mining teams. Rabbit Watson had at last found a means of bringing attention to himself so that he would be put into the position of entering the race through persuasion rather than desire. A member of his mine's team, he managed to connect with the ball. It was good for a two or three-base hit, but Rabbit really opened up and made a home run by a wide margin. And that home run cinched the game. As one man the miners swept across the field, caught him up, and carried him about on their shoulders. "You're a ball player," his superintendent excitedly shouted; "but you are something else. You're the next winner of the Mount Meehan Marathon!"

Rabbit's show of modesty was well acted. "Aw, boys! I can't run. Just got excited over poling out that ball!"

"You're going to try out, anyway," the superintendent insisted; "do it in the morning. I want to see what you can do. Maybe we'll spring a surprise on Dudley, Marlowe, Dean and a few others who have come in first or second the last five years."

"Well, if you boys insist, but don't

bet on me." And for once Rabbit spoke the truth. He wanted no man, except Plush, to bet on him. For every dollar wagered by an outsider cut down their possible clean-up just that much.

The following morning at dawn with the superintendent holding the stop watch Rabbit trotted up the peak and back again. It proved harder than he expected; but his time, seventy minutes, was not bad for a first attempt. The superintendent thumped him on the back gleefully. "You can cut that down with practice, Stan," he cried, "cut it down a lot."

Inwardly Rabbit agreed with him. He had not extended himself, and was quite sure he could lop off eight minutes the next time he tried it and in competition cut it down to fifty-nine or sixty minutes. "What's the record?" he inquired.

"Fifty-eight minutes! That was made six years ago under the best of conditions. Since then it has been around sixty and sixty-one. You are a stranger here, Stan," the superintendent continued confidentially; "you don't know how important this race is. If one of the men from our mine wins we'll have a cup to stick up in the front office and something to blow about for a year. Everybody will be back of you. Here's the proposition. You report to the timekeeper morning and night, but you don't have to work. I want you to train for this race. From time to time I'll clock you to the peak and back. Study the different trails carefully and pick the one you can make the best time on. Now we'll go over to Flapjack's place and fill out an entry blank."

The superintendent was a go-getter. That was one reason he was boss of one of the biggest mines near Cold Deck. "Got a live wire here, Flapjack. Meet Mr. Stan Kupoff, the next Marathon winner."

Flapjack smiled. "I've already met him, Barton. Next winner, eh? Well, there may be some doubt about it. I hope so, that's what makes the race interesting. A sure thing would spoil it all." Flapjack filed Rabbit's blank with others and watched the pair depart. Then he paced his office a few moments, hands behind his back, head bowed in thought. "Looks as if this race would be interesting and a lot of money change hands. Guess I'll have to help things along a bit and cover any money Barton's gang bets on Mr. Kupoff, and they'll bet a lot."

At the same moment Rabbit was pondering on the same problem. He did not want to be proclaimed a winner. He wanted to be the dark horse with an outside chance to win.

While Rabbit was wrestling with this angle of the situation and keeping up a running fire of answers to Superintendent Barton's enthusiastic comments, Flapjack Meehan was sending for his stenographer. "Take this letter, please," he said; "it is to my old friend 'Skookum Sam' of the Pelly Indians. Mr. Skookum Sam Noah. Noah is the name some white man gave him as a family name. He's named after the Ark's skipper. Now to proceed. 'Klahowya Tilikum: Nika——!'" Abruptly Flapjack ceased his dictation. "I guess I'd better write this letter myself. You'll prob'ly get stuck on the spelling!"

"Perhaps it is just as well," the girl answered; "I'm baffled at the start. Why the mystery?"

Flapjack winked, then with his long slim forefingers began to pick out the following letter on the typewriter:

NIKA KLOSHE TILIKUM: Nika tikegh skookum Siwash kopa hyak cooley saghalie nika la monti hyak pee tolo chikamin kopa cultus Boston man. Mika Tillikum,

PEWHATE SAPOLIL MEEHAN.

"Merciful heavens!" the girl exclaimed as she finished reading the let-

ter, "what does Pewhate Sapolil Meehan mean?"

"Roughly, that's Chinook for Flapjack. Skookum Sam will get the drift and the importance of the letter. Seal it please and address it to him. He's down on the Pelly River. The exact location is in my address book. Thanks!"

Plush Fuller was bidding his sweetheart farewell.

"But," she protested, "you may get killed in that terrible country."

"Not me," Plush replied. "Rabbit says it's not half bad and that the miners are just waiting to be plucked. Get the point? They dig the gold, and I take it away from them. Yes, there's going to be a killing; and I'm going to make it. Be a good girl, and I'll bring you back enough furs to make a coat. I'll buy 'em direct from an Indian or something, and you'll know they are good. What do you want?"

Nancy Devoe knew a hot iron when she saw it, so she struck. "Well, as long as you are up there pick up enough ermine for a full-length coat!"

"I thought they were wearing short coats these days," he objected.

"Well, perhaps they are; but if a girl has a full-length ermine coat, and she wears it, she is sort of setting the style I should say."

"How many skins will it take?"

"Oh, make it a thousand! You can afford it, you'll be cleaning up big money."

Plush noted in his little book, "Bring Nancy a thousand ermine skins for coat."

On the long trip to Alaska he picked up scattering information about the Mount Meehan Marathon. Rabbit was evidently playing his cards cleverly, for "Stan Kupoff" was spoken of merely as an entry and not as a winner. The event was one week off when Plush arrived at Cold Deck. He registered at the camp's best hotel, deposited approximately fifty thousand dollars in the Cold Deck Bank and headed for the New Deal Café. A large blackboard had been erected. On it were the names of the various entries and money offered on their winning.

"What's this?" he inquired of the man he instantly recognized as Flapjack.

The tall sour dough explained the event. "And the amounts are in gold, not conversation. Every cent put up there is in our safe at the present time, ready for the winner. Better hang around, big doings to-night. All those entered will be here to be looked over."

"I've bet on horses a lot, but never men. Is there any chance to clean up? I've got some loose change."

Flapjack blinked. "Just what do you mean by loose change. When Carmack hit Skagway after the Klondike he slammed a thousand dollars' worth of nuggets on the bar and called it cigar money."

Plush thought fast. Flapjack was evidently accustomed to large sums changing hands during a sporting event. This made his part easier. "Cigar money, eh? Called a thousand dollars' worth of nuggets cigar money. Well, I guess that's what it was. I'm a Wall Street broker myself; and I've seen money change hands, millions lost or gained and never a bat of the eye. I've got some loose change, fifty thousand, to be exact. If I can get action, I'll hang around here." He lowered his voice. "You might list a few good mining propositions when you get around to it. Keep it dark, but that's my real business in the North. I'll look the men over to-night, and if one strikes my fancy I'll back him with a dollar or two."

With that Plush seated himself at an obscure table. "Wow!" he whispered. "Big money doesn't impress that guy, any."

It was about eight o'clock that the room began filling up. Then a group of men appeared; some were lean and powerful, others short and compactly built.

As the favorites were introduced the room was deafened with cheers. "Stan Kupoff of the Big Shot Mine!" Tubby Willows announced. Rabbit stepped forth and received his tribute from the Big Shot delegation. Plush noted that he was in great shape. "A cinch," he whispered, "if I can only get my money down! Hello, here's something the cat dragged in!"

Tubby Willows brought forth a solemn Indian. He almost scowled as he faced the crowd. "And this, gentlemen, is 'Muckamuck Bill.' He hails from the Pelly River country and arrived several days ago with a canoe load of furs. Flapjack calls him the dark horse of the Marathon."

At this point Muckamuck scowled blackly, and Tubby's humor was well received.

"He's just entered the Marathon, but I'm told his real speed is with his legs under the table. The Chechahcos present may wish to know that muckamuck means eat and Bill has earned his name."

As the native climbed down from the table on which he was standing, Tubby added, "The boys will be glad to answer any questions you gents wish to ask."

Plush hurried forward, but passed Rabbit by without speaking. The native, Muckamuck Bill, has furs and was running. The chance was too good to pass up. "Got a thousand ermine, Bill?" Plush demanded.

Muckamuck scowled and shook his head. "Halo Kumtuks!" he growled.

"I don't get you!" Plush replied.

"Need some help?" Flapjack inquired, "I speak Chinook!"

"He's got some furs and I want to buy a thousand ermine. He's in the race; and if he wants to make a sporting proposition out of it, I'm on."

Flapjack spoke rapidly and glanced at Muckamuck. The latter nodded. Then he led the way to a rear room and opened a number of packs. In a brief time the floor and bed were covered with ermine, marten, beaver, silver fox, and mink. Plush loved pretty women, and pretty women wore furs. He was dizzy. Imagine Nancy with that silver fox around her neck, or a short beaver coat, or the ermine full length, or a couple of those marten about her shoulders, or—— He bit his cheeks to keep from grinning. He had heard that the Indian is a great gambler, and now he wondered just how strong Muckamuck would go. "The goddess of chance is sure sweet to me these days," he whispered; "delivers a fool native and a load of pelts into my hands." He turned to Flapjack. "How game is this Muckluk or whatever his name is?"

Flapjack put the question and translated the reply. "He says the sky's the limit. He's going from Cold Deck rich or broke."

"Sport, eh? Well, I want a thousand ermine; about six of the marten; that silver fox, and twelve of those beaver. Now what are they worth?"

Apparently Muckamuck was willing to leave it to Flapjack. "A dollar each for the ermine; twenty-two each for the beaver; two hundred for the fox, and thirty-five each for the marten is a mighty fair figure to both parties; roughly call it sixteen hundred and fifty dollars."

"And he'll bet that fur against sixteen fifty, eh?"

"I'll take care of the fur; and you deposit money or a certified check with me to-morrow," Flapjack directed.

"The first thing in the morning!" Plush withheld a desire to rub his hands gleefully, but promised himself to send a code message to Nancy that

very night telling of their mutual good fortune. "Why, when I hit the big town that little girl will walk into my arms. And now for a word with Rabbit."

He brought it about naturally enough by introducing himself, as many others were doing. "Anybody wise?" he whispered.

"Not a soul! Say, I put over a neat one. Pretended to sneak off for a secret trial and a couple of them followed. I made it in fifty-nine minutes and ten seconds. Marlowe pulled a real secret trial; and his time got out—fifty-nine flat. He's the favorite."

"And your real time?" Plush eagerly demanded.

"My real secret trial, not giving myself any the best of it, is fifty-seven flat. Oh, don't look surprised, remember who I am; but don't tell anybody about it!"

"No danger of that."

"Bring plenty of jack?"

"Yeah! And I'll get it down as soon as possible. I hear the Big Shot Mine is backing you to the limit."

"That's true. I only hope Meehan covers every cent they raise. Then that'll leave the rest of the money for us to cover. And there's sure to be a lot of it. S'long, see you the day of the race."

"I'll be on hand to see you win and"—he lowered his voice—"to see that you do win!" Then knowing from experience that appraising eyes are usually on a stranger, Plush hurried forward and met the others. Each he wished luck, each he complimented on his condition.

Red of face from exertion Superintendent Barton of the Big Shot staggered into the New Deal Café and dumped ten thousand dollars in gold and silver on the counter. "Got enough money to cover that, Flapjack? We're betting it on Stan Kupoff!"

Flapjack shot a suspicious glance at Barton. "That's a lot of money."

"The boys figure Stan's got lots in his legs. Others figure otherwise."

Flapjack nodded and was thoughtful for several moments. "There's a lot of Kupoff money hereabouts. In fact all free money is covered. However, I'll cover it myself."

"You?"

"Why not?"

"Fair enough!" Barton was scratching his head. "Why are you so sure Kupoff will lose?"

"For the same reason you figure he'll win." Flapjack scribbled something on a paper, placed it in an envelope and sealed it. "Read this after the race!" he said. "I'm calling a turn."

The great day dawned clear; and an hour before the race—which was set at an early hour in order that the men might be at their best—the crowd had gathered.

Pungent smoke from many pipes and cigarettes drifted lazily on the morning air; men talked in excited tones; and cheer after cheer broke the silence of the peaks. Mount Meehan towered above the surrounding country, though snow-capped peaks of the great range behind it dwarfed Flapjack's personal peak.

The trail was wide enough for three or four men from the start to timber line. Willing hands had cleared away the brush to a width of fifteen feet. Above timber line the trail narrowed. Two men could pass in places, but there were stretches hardly two feet in width running along a ridge. High on the peak a flag waved furiously. Calm in the valley, there was a wind above timber line. Around the flag pole each man must pass before swinging down a different trail for the finish. With a few exceptions the crowd remained in the valley where the greater portion of the race could be witnessed. Here and there supporters climbed to points

of vantage where they could cheer their favorites.

The crack of a pistol sent seven men leaping from the start, and the crowd cheered as one man. Marlowe took the lead. He was a well-built fellow, but had none of the experience and trickery of Rabbit Watson. Rabbit hung to his heels, worrying him by a constant threat to pass, yet never passing. Marlowe increased his speed, but still the ringer from Outside hung on. Clearly this pair were the leaders. Fifty yards behind them came the nearest man, and the field was strung out when they burst from the timber and began climbing the ridge.

The cold wind from the glaciers cooled their hot bodies, gave them new strength. With a final burst of speed Marlowe forged ahead. For a hundred rods he kept the lead, then "Pad! Pad! Pad!" of Rabbit's feet. The thought came that this man could pass him at will, that in his iron legs was more strength than Marlowe possessed. The latter gave the best he had—more no man can do—then faltered. Rabbit failed to conceal his sneer of triumph as he passed. He had deliberately forced the other to wear himself out. Cheers from the Big Shot crowd floated up like vapor from the valley. Rabbit rounded the pole and began the descent. Marlowe was a poor third, now, and the second man?

Rabbit's throat and lips went suddenly dry. The second man was Muckamuck. A hundred feet behind him. Somehow he had come up almost unobserved from the rear. Shale that filled a narrow depression opened up before Rabbit. Without hesitation he shot downward. Had this been rock the incline would have been too steep, but each foot went several inches into the shale and checked the plunge somewhat. He ran at top speed, the hiss and clatter of the disturbed shale in his ears. Then it increased, he dare not look back. The sound grew in volume and the whole side of the mountain seemed to be moving. Heedless, Muckamuck closed in; and, for a few brief seconds, they ran abreast. From below came no cheers. The valley was silent, tense. The timber loomed ahead, the trail narrowed as it followed another rocky ridge before vanishing into the timber. Muckamuck forged ahead a scant ten feet, gaining inch by inch as he neared timber line.

Fear suddenly gripped Rabbit. The thought of losing the race had not occurred to him. Was it possible there were runners, unknown, his equal? His breath was coming in sobs, his heart pounding his ribs until he could feel its furious beating. The accursed Indian! And Plush had laughed at his wagering his furs! If Plush was in the timber as he promised it was up to him to do something. The native seemed to skim along. He didn't smile nor scowl, but his face was serious. Rabbit gathered all of his strength for the final burst. Let him get ahead; and Plush would take care of Muckamuck down there in the timber. The depths of his reserve were plumbed; he held his own, then crawled up, bit by bit. Again they were equal; then Rabbit passed, but only for a moment. The native gained steadily, and, when he did that, Rabbit knew he was beaten. Far down he caught sight of a movement in the brush. Plush was on the job!

Very much on the job, in fact! He had pulled down a small willow and held it in place with a fine wire. It looked like any number of hastily slashed boughs along the trail. Merely slacking away on the wire would snap the willow upward, and the margin of winning or losing might well be measured by a nasty fall. He saw Rabbit's face was drawn from the strain, and ten feet behind came Muckamuck intent on the leader. The moment Rabbit had crossed the bough, Plush re-

leased the wire. The bough sprang upward, but Muckamuck leaped clear and rushed on. Almost at the same instant a hand knocked Plush sprawling. As he rolled over Barton towered above with clenched fists, his face drawn with rage.

"You rat!" Barton snarled, "you dirty rat!"

"You should worry," Plush said nervously; "if Rabbit's beaten it'll cost you a lot, too." The word had slipped out unconsciously.

"Rabbit! Rabbit? Not Rabbit Watson, the Marathon runner?"

"Sure!" Plush smiled, his attitude inviting. "You stand to clean up ten thousand dollars. Keep your mouth shut."

"You dirty rat!" Barton repeated. Runners fighting it out for third place were amazed to see the Big Shot superintendent shaking Plush like a rat. "I'll have to give Flapjack his money back. It ain't square. I'll have to give Flapjack——" A mighty cheer from below interrupted. Timber hid the winner from view.

"Who won? Who won?" Barton spoke hoarsely.

The thud of footsteps sounded sharply, and Flapjack Meehan came into view. "Just heard you two were fighting," he panted. "Well, it's over, Mr. Plush Fuller. About once in every so often somebody plays Alaskans for boobs. What do you suppose we do these long winters? I go in for sports when I'm not reading. I pegged your Stanislas Kupoff as Rabbit Watson the minute I saw him. I figured you or somebody like you would be along, so I wrote a little letter. Here it is!"

"Who won?" Barton demanded.

"Muckamuck, hands down, Rabbit blew up at the finish!" Plush was staring at the carbon copy of Flapjack's letter. "That don't mean a thing to me," he said.

"Substantially those Chinook words mean this," Flapjack said:

"My Good Friend: I want a good Indian to run fast up my mountain and win money from a bad white man. Your friend,
"Flapjack Meehan."

"Well," Flapjack continued, "my good friend Skookum Sam trotted out his fastest Indian runner. You know they don't have telephones and telegraph lines between tribes, and the good old-fashioned runner and age-old systems of communication are still used. Besides cleaning up the prize money, Muckamuck still has his furs and sixteen hundred and fifty dollars he won from you. Simple fool, eh?"

"And you rung in a ringer to beat a ringer, eh?" Barton demanded. And before Flapjack could bring up his hands in defense, Barton's fist had knocked him sprawling. Flapjack was up in an instant. He was no match for the younger man in a rough-and-tumble fight, but his long reach had its advantage. He poked a gnarled fist into Barton's face and cracked him on the nose. "Keep back!" Crack! "Keep back, Barton!" Crack! "There, now I've darn near busted your nose!" Crack! "Keep back! Read that note I gave you!" Smack! "Don't be a fool!" Smack!

Flapjack spent a busy minute forcing Barton to listen to reason. Then he brought forth the note and read:

"I've imported a dark horse to trim Rabbit Watson, alias Stan Kupoff. The ten-thousand bet is off. Come get your money any time."

Barton flushed and wiped the blood from his face. "Kick me, Flapjack for going off half cocked. I might have known you'd shoot square." Then he whirled on Plush. "You rat!" he bellowed; but Flapjack held him back.

"Don't hit the poor simpleton," Flapjack pleaded. "This has cost him close

to fifty thousand dollars in money and a million dollars in pride. He came North to trim the boobs and got trimmed. Wait until the world hears that." He turned to Plush. "You're broke and got a hotel bill besides. There's no place I know of where you can exercise your peculiar talents, so you'll have to go to work. I've got a job for you. It's not a plush-lined job, but it's honest. You take both hands and firmly grasp a pick handle, and the pick does the rest."

"He won't take it!" Barton growled with a dark glance toward the stunned Plush.

"He's got to take it or quit eating," Flapjack replied; "and, speaking of food, let's go down and watch Muckamuck put away a couple of moose steaks and all the trimmings. When he crossed the finish he kept up the pace to the New Deal Café; and our cook was right at his heels yelling, 'Slow down, you hound, you can't eat until I get there.'"

HARD TIMES FOR TRANSCONTINENTAL HIKERS

ONCE upon a time, hiking across the continent through the West along the Lincoln Highway, the National Old Trails and other main arteries of motor travel was not such a difficult task. Motorists were generous and kindly disposed, and they would give lifts readily to those whom they saw toiling along afoot.

A great many things have happened of late to change this attitude on the part of motorists, and this makes things harder for the touring pedestrian. At one time, all a hiker needed to do would be to set out in the morning from the town where he had spent the night, and he could count with almost certainty on being offered a lift before he had gone more than a mile. The rule was walk one mile and ride fifty.

The change of heart on the part of drivers of cars has been caused by the abuse of their hospitality by hikers. Then, too, thugs and hold-up men in the guise of hikers have resorted to various tricks to victimize motorists, so that the driver of a car is afraid to stop and offer a ride to those he passes on the road. The tricks of these holdup men are varied and ingenious. They will lie in the roadway and pretend that they have been badly hurt, or they will limp along painfully. Another dodge is to buy a can of gasoline and walk along with it, pretending that they have a car a little farther on. Once they can get in the back seat of a car, their main purpose is achieved. After that is accomplished, it is a simple matter to slug the driver over the head, throw him out into the bushes along the side of the highway, and make away with the car.

The way of the hobo-hiker through the West is therefore much more difficult nowadays than it was some years ago, but you can hardly blame the automobilist. His policy of stinginess with his lifts is an act of self-preservation.

Men Who Made the West

PAT GARRETT

By *Erle Wilson*

Author of "Pocatello," etc.

DOWN in the Southwest a legend has grown up around the name of Pat Garrett. Many exciting stories of the deeds of valor performed by this man are still current in the Pecos country. Serving as sheriff of New Mexico in the days when that state was the newest frontier, Garrett literally cleaned up the "bad lands" of the region. No nervier officer ever trailed a desperado across a wide treeless mesa or up a rugged mountain path. As a tamer of the border outlaw he had no peer in all Western history.

Pat Garrett as so many other famous men in the annals of the West was not born in the region beyond the Mississippi. His birthplace was Chambers County, Alabama, where his adventurous life began on June 5, 1850. When Pat was still a small boy his family moved to Claiborne Parish in Louisiana, locating near the village of Haynesville. In the vicinity of this southern hamlet the lad spent his early boyhood, remaining under the Garrett rooftree until he reached the age of seventeen. Then it was that the call of adventure proved too strong to be longer resisted, and he turned his face toward the ranchlands of the great Southwest.

For a short period Garrett lived in Lancaster, Texas, later moving to New Mexico, then a Territory. At this time this was the bloodiest section of the United States. The population of the land which had only recently been acquired from Mexico, was a mixture of uncivilized Indians and sullen Mexicans, who hated the conquering "gringo" with all the ardor of their fiery Latin temperaments. Here, too, came in great numbers the criminal element from the more civilized and orderly parts of the United States. The southwestern frontier was a veritable haven to the man with a price

upon his head. Here he could not only find refuge and safe hiding for past offenses, but could carry on his career of robbing and killing without fear of punishment. In this section no law was enforced. To be sure there were scattered over the territory several military posts where from one to two thousand soldiers were stationed. Their duties however were primarily to hold the Indians in check, and aid was given to the civil authorities only when some mob disturbance such as a riot, was in progress.

In this lawless and danger-ridden section Garrett soon became an outstanding character. His very appearance set him apart as a leader of men. Pat Garrett was of a strong physique, six feet four inches in stature. His manner was frank and thoughtful, and he was inclined to silence. When he spoke, however, it was to the point, and woe to the man who mistook his mild manner for weakness. On such occasions his steel-blue eyes looked through the offender, and no stranger ever made the same mistake twice. In handling a six-shooter Garrett could match his skill with any bad man on the border. As in the case of a strong personality he had many enemies, but his foes were outnumbered by his friends.

After some adventuring Pat bought a ranch near Roswell and here he lived the free, easy life of a cattleman. When he was twenty-nine years old the ranchman fell in love with the dark-eyed señorita of a near-by hacienda. The strong, silent Westerner's affection was returned and in 1879 he married Miss Guitterez, who was connected with the historic Spanish family of that name, one of her kinsmen having served as Governor of California in the days before the American conquest. It was in this same year also that Garrett was appointed deputy sheriff of Lincoln County, which was from 1875 to 1882 the most crime-ridden spot in the country. During this period two hundred men were killed in southwestern New Mexico, most of the murders being committed in Lincoln County. This pocket on the southwestern frontier was the rendezvous of gunmen, cattle rustlers, liquor traders, and gamblers.

Here also a fierce war was being waged between ranchmen, the strife having originated over the question of the right of the range and the illegal branding of cattle. Lincoln County was one of the best cattle sections of New Mexico, and it was easier to steal from the herds that grazed in the Pecos Valley than to raise them. The thieves also found a good market at Fort Stanton where a large number of soldiers had to be fed. If this market failed there was the Mescalero Indian Reservation near by. The cattle king of the section was John Chisholm who owned 80,000 head of cattle. Many of his punchers turned "rustlers" and thieved the stock they were paid to protect. One of the many bloody contests that make the history of the southwest so picturesque was the war waged between Chisholm and other cattle kings; another was that carried on between the Murphy and McSween factions.

Pat Garrett showed his mettle at once by capturing a number of bad men who were active in this cattle war. He also silenced a few desperadoes who were foolish enough to think that they could get the drop on him. The method of the peace officer was invariably to try to beat the criminal to the draw. The outlaws in turn fought for this favorable position, and some of them recklessly gambled with fate, even when the officer had them covered, hoping that they could reverse the position or that the officer would not pull the trigger of his gun.

Early in his career Pat Garrett had such an experience with a desperado. He had received a notice from police headquarters in a certain eastern city

to the effect that a man was wanted there for murder. It was thought probable that the criminal had fled to this outlaw's haven on the southwestern frontier, and a reward of twelve thousand dollars was offered for his arrest. The description stated among other items that the murderer had a "freckled face and a red spot in the right eye."

"Freckles are common enough," said the deputy sheriff. "I'm going to pin my faith to the red spot."

With this distinguishing point in mind Pat Garrett started out to chase down the man, determined to bring him to justice if he was hiding in the Pecos Valley. Finally his trail carried him to a lonely saloon on a broad wind-swept mesa near old Fort Sumner. This hang-out was presided over by a rough-looking individual who was a stranger to the neighborhood. True to Western etiquette no questions had been asked as to where the newcomer hailed from, but Pat had reason to be suspicious. Taking an assistant deputy with him one day Garrett strolled into the saloon, ostensibly to drown a large thirst.

Before entering Pat said to his companion:

"Don't shoot until you see me reach for my gun. To make certain about that identification mark in the right eye I'm going to order two rounds of drinks. I've noticed that a bartender never looks a customer in the eye until he raises his glass to drink, and I want to get a couple of good squints at this fellow."

This program was accordingly carried out. Each time Pat raised his glass to his lips the bartender, true to form, looked him straight in the face. And each time Pat clearly saw the red spot in the suspected man's right eye. Suddenly the deputy sheriff dropped his glass and brought up his gun. But the bartender refused to lift his hands. Calmly he left them upon the bar, taking his chance that the peace officer would not shoot. Pat's blue eyes grew as cold as the steel he held in his hand. In the light of them the criminal's nerve failed, and he gave up the bluff. Shakily his hands mounted skyward. Garrett put the irons on him and started for Las Vegas with his prisoner in a wagon. The next morning the murderer confessed his crime and was turned over to the authorities.

Outlaws who didn't mind the draw seemed to be rather numerous in the Southwest, for it was just a little later that Pat had another experience of a similar nature. One day in Las Cruces the Lincoln County peace officer ran into a sheriff from the Indian Nation. This officer was on the lookout for a fugitive who had broken out of a penitentiary after killing a guard and another man.

"He's the most desperate criminal I ever met," said the strange sheriff to Garrett. "He'll put up a fight no matter how we come on him. We'll have to kill him to jail him."

"Oh, well, we'll see about that," responded Garrett in his slow, mild way.

After some scouting around, the criminal was located on a ranch eight miles out of town, where he had taken a job as cook.

"You stay in town," Garrett suggested to the visiting officer. "He'll recognize you, but I, being a stranger, may be able to put something over."

The next day Garrett set out on his mission, taking a Mexican deputy with him. When he reached the ranch house Pat left his assistant on the outside in calling distance and went in alone. The outlaw had just finished his incongruous domestic job of dish washing and was wiping his hands on a towel when Garrett entered the kitchen. The sheriff easily got the drop on him, but the criminal ignored this fact and after dealing the officer a hard blow with his fist jumped through an open

W7 B

window. As he went out Garrett caught at the man's shirt, ripping it from his back. But this didn't stop the outlaw. Garrett ran out of the door and met the fugitive from justice on the porch. He wanted to take the man alive, so instead of shooting him, he struck out at him with the handcuffs he was carrying.

At the sharp crack the outlaw dropped to the ground, but came up like a flash, landing such a terrific blow on Garrett's head that it jarred him. The two men then had a hand-to-hand scuffle. Suddenly breaking away the criminal sprang through the open door and ran down the hall, intent upon reaching his room and securing his six-shooter. Pat had just about decided that the sheriff from the Indian Nation was right and that the man would only be taken dead when in dashed his assistant. Seeing the culprit rushing down the hall, apparently making a swift get-away, the Mexican calmly raised his gun and fired, shooting the outlaw in the back.

Garrett soon gained fame throughout the southwest as a peace officer. Time and again he demonstrated his championship to the outlaws of the section and so won the respect of the criminal element of the bad lands. The worst desperadoes on the border scorned to surrender to an officer who had not proved his mettle. As a couplet of the old rustler's chorus expresses it:

"When we turned our sixes loose we let the sheriffs know
It took a Joe Dandy to bring us from Mexico!"

Meantime conditions in Lincoln County were growing worse and worse. The cattle war was still raging, many personal feuds had sprung up, and southwestern New Mexico was a veritable bloody battle ground. A few bold cattlemen had entered the Pecos Valley with their herds. Here the outlaws held sway, and a guerrilla warfare was being carried on. Chief among the outlaw gangs was that under the leadership of Billy the Kid, the worst desperado who ever darkened the pages of the history of the Southwest. This desperate crew was proving a menace to the whole territory, and it was to rid the gang of its leader that Pat Garrett was elected sheriff of Lincoln County in 1881.

Cool-headed, a skilled shot, and thoroughly familiar with the habits and hiding places of the outlaws of the region, it was believed by the community that if any one could reach this desperado with the long arm of the law it would be Pat Garrett. William Antrim, sometimes called Billy Bonny, but generally known as Billy the Kid had played hide-and-seek with half the sheriffs of Arizona and New Mexico during his short life. This criminal was a mere slip of a lad, twenty-one years of age, but he was a thorough-going bad man, with an inhuman appetite for evil. Unlike most desperadoes Billy the Kid slew not in anger or self-defense but for pure wantonness.

His career of crime had started when he was fifteen years old, at which time he had killed a man in Silver City, New Mexico, and fled from home. Stealing, killing, and eluding peace officers, the boy with the precocious criminal tendencies soon became a hardened outlaw. In his wanderings Billy landed one day at John Chisholm's ranch and as he was a skilled shot and a good horseman the outlaw succeeded in landing a job as cowboy with the cattle king. Soon however The Kid quarreled over the question of wages, and the desperado rode away from the Chisholm ranch swearing a barbarous vendetta against his employer. Becoming the leader of a desperate crew of characters he added many notches to his already ornamented gunhandle during the bloody Lincoln County war.

WSB

Certain it is that there were enough crimes on The Kid's record to make his capture a spectacular achievement. However Pat Garrett was not looking for any glory for himself but was merely carrying out his duties as a peace officer when he organized a posse of his neighbors near his Roswell ranch and started in pursuit of the desperado. Billy the Kid was as active as an eel and led his pursuers a merry chase. His headquarters were at Los Portales, where he hid away from prying eyes in a cave in a quarry of rock about fifteen feet high. From this vantage point he commanded an extensive view of the surrounding plains and so could anticipate any unwelcome visitor. Here also the criminal gang concealed its booty and stolen cattle.

After many zigzaggings back and forth across the country and several sharp if short encounters Pat Garrett finally trailed The Kid and three of his companions to a deserted house, built by a Spaniard called Alejandro Perea, at Stinking Springs. Garrett had as his trusted lieutenants on this expedition Bob Ollinger and a deputy named Stewart. On The Kid's side were a resolute band, consisting of Billy Wilson, Dave Rudebaugh, and Tom Pickett, all desperate criminals. The outlaws had fastened their horses near the cabin which they had fortified. Garrett stationed his men about fifty yards away where they were concealed by some natural rock formations.

It was midafternoon when the battle opened, a rapid passage of shots being exchanged between the two factions. Garrett's men kept well under cover, however, and none was injured, while one outlaw was killed by a bullet that penetrated the cabin door. By dark ammunition was running low. Suddenly Garrett saw a slim, active figure dart out of the cabin and make toward the place where the horses were tied. In the dusk he could scarcely discern the gliding form, but as the shadowy movements indicated that the man was returning to the cabin, leading a horse, the sheriff raised his gun and fired. As a kindly fate would have it he succeeded in killing the horse which The Kid had led to the door, the animal falling in such a way as to block the cabin entrance.

After this incident there was silence for some time. Finally Garrett called out:

"Say, Kid, how are you fixed in there?"

"Pretty well," the outlaw replied. "But we haven't any wood to cook our dinner."

"Then why not come out and share ours?" Pat asked.

"Sorry, Pat," The Kid responded, "but we'll have to refuse your kind invitation. Business is very pressing today."

Perceiving that the outlaws were not going to surrender unless pushed to it Garrett ordered his posse to surround the house and set it afire. The first crackling of a shingle and the smell of smoke proved too deadly a warning to be ignored, however, and Dave Rudebaugh stuck out a dingy handkerchief. Then The Kid announced that they would surrender if guaranteed against violence. Garrett promised and commanded:

"Come out with your hands up."

Slowly the outlaws filed out, Billy the Kid first, followed by Rudebaugh, Wilson, and Pickett. Forthwith the irons were clamped on them, and Garrett's men started with their prisoners for Las Vegas. As there were United States warrants out for all the outlaws except Pickett Las Vegas was only the first stopping place, the objective being Santa Fe.

On the morning of December 27th Garrett took his prisoners out of jail and put them in a box car, over which a strict guard was stationed. The sher-

iff anticipated that when the identity of his prisoners was known there would be trouble. Nor was he mistaken in his surmises, for before the train could pull out of the station an angry crowd of Mexicans and whites, armed with revolvers, swept down on Garrett demanding the prisoners. For an hour the train was unable to move, while the sheriff and his deputies kept the threatening mob at bay. Finally the leader of the gang started toward the platform, waving his revolver as he tried to push his way on. He was followed by several of the bravest of the mob. Suddenly Pat Garrett, his blue eyes flashing steel, but his voice mild and slow, turned on the men and said:

"You get away from here and stay away."

Obediently the men turned and rode off. In telling of the incident afterward Garrett said: "They were a bunch of fourflushers. When I requested them to get down from the platform, they slid to the ground like a covey of hard-back turtles off the banks of the Pecos."

At length the sheriff placed his prisoners in the Santa Fe jail. Later they were tried and convicted. Billy the Kid was taken to Mesilla where he was tried for the murder of a man named Roberts at the Mescalero Apache agency three years before. He was acquitted and immediately stood trial for the assassination of the sheriff of Lincoln County, who had preceded Garrett in this office. Of this crime he was duly convicted. As the judge pronounced sentence on the notorious outlaw he stated in stern tones:

"I hereby sentence you to be hanged by the neck until you are dead—dead—dead!"

Mockingly the slim, pale-faced youth, with the astonishing record of evil answered:

"And you can go to hell, hell, hell."

Billy the Kid was taken from Mesilla and turned over to Garrett at Fort Stanton, nine miles west of the town of Lincoln. There was no jail here, a dilapidated two-story building being used to confine criminals. Here Garrett placed The Kid in a room on the second floor. The prisoner was handcuffed and had as his two guards Deputy Sheriff J. W. Bell and Deputy Marshal Robert Ollinger. Things looked rather dark for the outlaw, but he never lost his air of confidence and bravado, even in the face of his impending doom. The Kid seemed to feel that the powers of evil would protect him. Meanwhile he was not neglecting any chances to help himself.

One day when his execution was only two weeks distant, The Kid's vigilance was rewarded. Ollinger was across the street, eating his dinner at a coffee house. The other deputy, Bell, was guarding The Kid while he ate. To enable the outlaw to carry the food to his mouth both handcuffs had been fastened to one wrist. Slowly The Kid was eating, his eyes fixed negligently on his guard, his catlike body ready to spring. For just one fleeting instant Bell relaxed his watch. This second was enough for the active desperado. Quick as lightning The Kid's hand came down on Bell's head, and the deputy fell to the floor with a dull thud. Then snatching Bell's pistol The Kid fired a shot through the body of the unconscious man.

Quickly making for the sheriff's office, The Kid grabbed a double-barreled shotgun which belonged to Ollinger. Meanwhile that deputy had heard shots and was hurrying across the street. As he reached the yard of the jail he heard some one call his name:

"Hello, Bob!"

The sound came from above. Looking up Ollinger saw The Kid standing in a window of the second story of the building. And this was the last sight that his eyes ever rested upon, for

Billy the Kid pulled the trigger of the shotgun he held, and Ollinger fell dead, shot by his own gun. The Kid laughed as he broke the weapon over the window sill, remembering that that very morning Ollinger had loaded his shot gun in his presence. As the deputy placed eighteen buck shot in each barrel he had remarked significantly: "The man who gets that will feel it!"

Within a few hours the peace officer was literally riddled with thirty-six shots, and Billy the Kid was on his way to freedom. Bonny forced the first man he met to loosen his handcuffs at the point of his gun. The next person he encountered was held up for a horse, and his escape was made good. At this time Garrett was at White Oaks, but upon receiving the bad news he hastened back to Lincoln and immediately took The Kid's trail. He found the chase more difficult than ever. So reckless and wanton had The Kid become that he had completely terrorized the community. To give information to the sheriff about his whereabouts meant certain death to the person who talked. So Garrett's questions were not answered.

Billy had been at large two months when Garrett heard that the notorious outlaw had been seen near Fort Sumner. The sheriff quickly made for this point, camping around in the vicinity for a couple of weeks without meeting with any luck. One night Garrett suggested to his assistants that they should pay Pete Maxwell a visit. Pete lived in an old building at the fort, and Pat felt that he had enough nerve to tell what he knew.

When Maxwell's place was reached Pat told his men to stay outside while he went on into the house. The two deputies accordingly seated themselves on the porch. As they sat there smoking they saw a slim figure approaching, easily discernible in the light of the bright New Mexican moon. With agile, hurried steps the man neared the house, starting back suddenly at the sight of the visitors on the veranda. In a shrill whisper he called in Spanish:

"Quien es?" (who is it?)

One of the deputies little suspecting the identity of the approaching man, answered in a reassuring voice:

"Put up your gun, man. Don't be scared."

The deputy rose as he spoke and walked toward the boyish figure, but the slim form eluded him and dashed through the open door into Maxwell's room. Coming into the darkness out of the bright moonlight outside, the intruder didn't discern the tall figure of the sheriff seated on the edge of Maxwell's bed. But some acute sixth sense seemed to be warning the criminal of danger. Nervously he questioned, his voice rising shrill and sharp.

"Say, Pete, what's up?"

Garrett recognized the form and the voice. Quickly the sheriff slipped his holster around so that he could reach his revolver. The young desperado saw the movement, and covering the sheriff with his pistol he sprang back, crying:

"Quien es?"

This hardly perceptible pause on the outlaw's part proved fatal. Ere his pistol was fired Pat Garrett's gun had spoken and Billy the Kid lay stretched out on the floor, with a bullet through his heart. So did the nerviest peace officer of the Southwest silence forever the most notorious desperado of the border. At the time he was killed Billy Bonny was only twenty-one years old, and it was said that the notches on his gun handle numbered a dead man for every year of his life. Certain it is that he had succeeded in writing his name in blood upon the pages of Western history.

Billy the Kid it was also who invented the twirling method of manslaughter, a device new to the frontier.

Prior to the advent of this outlaw upon the border it was Western etiquette when a man found himself looking into the muzzle of an antagonist's pistol to take his own revolver slowly from its holster and deliver it butt foremost. If this method was not observed and the front end did not point toward the covered man, his adversary wasted no time but fired immediately. It remained for Billy to defy this accepted code of manners.

Once one of the best sheriffs in New Mexico went after The Kid and succeeded in getting the drop on him in good style. Out came the outlaw's pistol according to the prescribed code with the butt foremost and the muzzle toward himself. Then as the sheriff reached to receive the weapon the heavy revolver suddenly circled on The Kid's trigger finger, its position being reversed with a quick, twirling movement, and the officer fell dead, shot through the heart. So did Billy the Kid gain distinction as a desperado on the border, while at the same time he forfeited all right to the courtesy of an arrest in the future.

When his term as sheriff expired Pat Garrett had succeeded in establishing law and order in Lincoln County. The peace officer then retired to his ranch at Roswell, where he remained until 1896. At this time he accepted the office of deputy sheriff of Dona Ana County. This section had succeeded Lincoln as the bloodiest spot in the United States. Situated upon the southwestern border of New Mexico, between Grant County on the west and Lincoln on the east, it was formerly Mexican territory, acquired by the United States in 1853, being part of the Gadsden Purchase. The first settlement made here was by a colony from Chihuahua. Then when the land was bought by the United States the Mexicans went home rather than remain in the domain of the hated gringo. Uncle Sam was fortunate in getting rid of such an undesirable element, but criminals soon began to sneak across the border, while other outlaws came in from more settled states.

Garrett's new job was to clean up this crime-ridden section as he had Lincoln County. Nor did he fall down on the assignment. His work in Dona Ana County added fresh laurels to the record of this famous Western peace officer. Fearlessly and efficiently he discharged his duty, only killing when a criminal refused to surrender or in defense of his own life. When order had been established in this bloody section Pat Garrett was appointed collector of customs at El Paso, Texas, by Theodore Roosevelt. This was in the year 1902, and Garrett held this position for four years. At the end of this time he moved back to his ranch in the Organ Mountains about twenty-five miles from Las Cruces.

It was two years later that Pat Garrett met his death in one of the darkest tragedies in Southwestern history. In the cattle raising country of New Mexico most quarrels originated over the question of land boundaries or grazing rights. Pat Garrett's misunderstanding with a cowboy by the name of Wayne Brazel grew out of a discussion as to whether goats or cattle should graze upon a ranch which Brazel had leased from the ex-sheriff.

Some time before the fatal incident Garrett got into financial difficulties, and to extricate himself from pressing obligations leased one of his two ranches in the Organ Mountains. The written contract did not specify the kind of stock which was to be kept on the range. Garrett stated that Brazel promised to keep from three to four hundred head of cattle. Brazel affirmed that nothing was specified and that he intended from the first to keep goats on the ranch, which is what he did.

This action angered Garrett who realized that goats would soon ruin the range for cattle and horses. He wanted to get Brazel off the ranch, and when all other methods had failed the ex-sheriff had the cowboy arrested under an old statute in New Mexico making it a misdemeanor to herd stock within a mile and a half of a ranch house or settlement. The case was dismissed by the justice of the peace and Garrett realized that the only course left open to him was to buy Brazel out or transfer the lease.

Meantime J. P. Miller of Fort Worth, Texas, and Carl Adamson of Roswell, New Mexico offered to buy Garrett's ranch. Garrett said he would be glad to sell but would have to get a man off first. The sheriff then arranged a meeting between Miller and Brazel at which time the latter agreed to sell his goats at $3.50 each and surrender the lease. Brazel estimated that he had about 1,200 goats. A few days later he raised the figure to 1,800 This caused the deal to fail, for Miller and Adamson were not willing to buy the six hundred extra animals.

On the day before the tragic shooting of Pat Garrett, Adamson hired a team and a buggy and went out to the ex-sheriff's ranch. The next day he and Garrett started to Las Cruces, having previously notified Brazel to meet them there in order that another attempt might be made to come to terms. When they started to town Garrett placed in the buggy his Burgess or "folding rifle" which could be folded and carried in a holster like a revolver, being snapped together in gun form when pulled from its holder. This gun was loaded with six shells of number eight bird shot.

Just outside the little settlement of Organ on a lonely stretch of road the pair in the buggy were overtaken by Brazel who was riding a horse. This man was of the typical cowboy type in appearance and wore a broad-brimmed, high-crowned hat pulled well down over his ears. Brazel was about thirty years old, with a ruddy complexion, sandy hair, and a strong physique. An ugly knife scar stretched from the right corner of his mouth to his chin. The cowboy had a Winchester rifle strapped to his saddle, and also carried a revolver on his left side. Brazel rode along by the buggy in which Garrett and Adamson were seated, keeping his right side toward the vehicle.

From time to time Pat Garrett's eyes rested on this weapon, which he supposed was the only one that Brazel carried as he was unable to see the revolver. The terms of the lease were discussed. By and by the discussion grew rather heated and Adamson later affirmed that he heard Garrett say to Brazel:

"I don't care whether you sell all your goats or not. I can get you off my ranch anyway."

About this time Adamson got out of the buggy to fix the horse's harness, and so did not hear or see directly what followed. But a few minutes later Garrett also left the vehicle. As he did so there were two sharp pistol reports, and the nerviest peace officer of New Mexico dropped to the ground. Garrett died instantly and without speaking.

Wayne Brazel got off his horse and as he handed his revolver to Adamson he remarked:

"This is hell!"

The shooting occurred near Las Cruces, New Mexico, on the morning of February 29, 1908, about five miles east of the village. Brazel rode on into town and surrendered to Sheriff Lucero, stating that he had killed Garrett in self-defense. And so the man who had cleaned up the bloodiest section of the border and silenced so many desperadoes met death. Just what occurred will probably never be known.

Many points about this tragedy seem inexplicable. If Garrett had been expecting difficulties of any kind it is certain that he would never have started to town armed only with a gun loaded with bird shot. And if he had been looking for trouble his antagonist would have had small chance of getting the drop on a man so experienced in dealing with criminals. His remark, "I'll get you off my ranch," doubtless had a legal interpretation and was not intended as a threat. Nor would he have gotten out of the buggy to carry it out.

Pat Garrett was buried in the little graveyard at Las Cruces, and with his passing New Mexico lost one of her most renowned characters. His record as a sheriff is unequaled in the history of the Southwest. With nerves of steel and indomitable courage, Garrett cut short the careers of many bad men, but he went to his grave with his hands unstained with innocent blood. His quarrels were not personal ones but were those of a community against its criminal element.

And so Pat Garrett, a fearless old-time peace officer, rightly takes his place on the honored list of those brave men who made the West.

A NEAT SHOT

THE sixty-five-year-old sheriff of Clay County, Texas, Sheriff George Cunningham, might well claim the title of world's champion long-range pistol shot. The veteran peace officer holds a record of a perfect bull's-eye at a distance of one hundred and forty-seven yards, a shot made under fire and under the most adverse conditions.

Sheriff Cunningham was peacefully enjoying a smoke on the veranda of the county jail one night, when he was called to the telephone and informed that an automobile load of highwaymen was speeding through Henrietta, the county seat, following a road-side robbery in which a man was shot. The sheriff immediately jumped into his own antiquated car and gave chase, overtaking the other machine when a gate impeded its progress.

As the bandits' automobile rolled to a stop, one of the men jumped out to open the gate; while another took his position beside the car, leveling a rifle over a fender at the officer, who had stopped his machine and was advancing on foot. As the bandit fired, Cunningham whipped his single-action .45 from its holster and, aiming at the man's head, which was the only part of his body visible, sent a bullet on its way. The bandit's shot went wild; but the sheriff's aim was true, and the outlaw rolled to the ground, his forehead creased neatly by the bullet.

Following the wounding of the robber, who ultimately recovered, the others surrendered to the sheriff, awed by his unerring accuracy. It is the only occasion known in this part of the Southwest in which an accurate shot was fired from such a distance with a six-shooter. The distance, as paced by several men, including one of the robbers, was one hundred and forty-seven yards.

A Bad Good Man Was He

By William Albert.

A WICKED man was John McKain;
A bad, bad man was he.
His "starb'ard" gun bore notches five,
His "port" gun, notches three,
And he had served a term or two
In penitentiary.

A brawny man with catlike tread,
A wild, uneasy grace,
With hard and restless steel-blue eyes
And tawny-bearded face,
He rode a horse with wild white eyes
And that same catlike pace.

"Younker, ah reckon you air lost!
Let's tak' you toe your maw!"
Said he to me, as he reached down
With a huge hairy paw.
I laughed as he uplifted me
And hugged me 'gainst his jaw.

"Younker, you hain't uh small bit scairt,
Air you?" I laughed again.
"I do not need to be!" I cried.
"Are you not John McKain?"
"Waal, na-ow, mebby thet air so!"
He laughed, a little vain.

So rode I on that white-eyed horse,
Master of all I saw,
That wild and wicked white-eyed horse
Reined by a fierce outlaw,
My arm about the outlaw's neck,
My cheek against his jaw.

And that is all, save John McKain
Died by a rope one day.
It was a long, long time ago,
"His soul is gone!" they say.
But I—I fancy you will find
Him out there—somewhere—aye!

Gunfleet's Dicker

By

Ernest Haycox

Author of "No Gent to Fool With," etc.

AS the pair of sorrels drew the spring wagon up the last winding grade, through a particularly dense forest, and finally reached a level stretch, Lars Hanson and his daughter saw for the first time their future home. It was a log cabin sitting at the base of immense fir trees, surrounded on all sides by underbrush. At some time past other settlers had cleared a small garden, but that had been quickly obliterated by the vines and the Oregon grape. Even in the shadows of approaching dusk it could be seen that the place was not very large and that it stood in need of many repairs. But to the weary travelers it was home. After a long day's journey over ridges and through cañons they gladly welcomed it. The air was sweet and clean. A vast primeval hush pervaded this wilderness, broken only by the gentle soughing of wind in the lofty branches and the splashing of a waterfall near by.

Lars Hanson raised his tremendous palm and swept it around. "Yah, this is home, Mister Slade. Me, I vas in the Minnesota veat fields ever since a younker of six. Never in all dot time did I see a big tree. Notting but sun and prairie. Now I live yust like I want to live. Yah."

The third member of the party, Slade, who had been looking at father and daughter with a sly amusement in his face, changed expression quickly as Hanson turned his way. He beamed affably, assuming sudden geniality. Though a rather robust man he was almost dwarfed by Hanson's immense bulk, and he had to look upward to meet the older man's sober and honest countenance. He stopped the team in front of the cabin, speaking heartily:

"You bet. 'Minute I saw you I said to myself, 'Slade, there is a party that

knows good land when he sees it. Yes, sir, that's the kind of a man he is; and, by George, I've got just the bargain for him.' Y'see Mister Hanson, I've spent my life in these woods. Know it like a book. If you was to come here, bein' a stranger, and try to find a good piece o' ground to take up you might look all summer. That's where us locators come in. Uncle Sam says you can make entry to most all o' this territory, but he don't furnish no guides. You got to dig it out for yourself. I tell you, Mister Hanson, it was mighty lucky you and me come together. There ain't another such bargain in the State."

"I belief you," agreed Hanson. "I ain't a man to forget favors. Some day I do you a good turn. Yah. But vat I can't get through dot thick head of mine is this timber claim business. Yust say it again."

The girl slid from her seat and without a word began to unpack the lighter pieces of equipment from the wagon. Slade's shrewd eyes turned momentarily to her as she moved toward the cabin, a lithe, free figure with deep blue eyes and a mass of gloriously yellow hair. Almost reluctantly he switched his attention to Hanson, repeating his former explanations patiently.

"Y'see, all this country is heavily timbered. But over beyond that ridge it's open country. Now the Government gives a settler easier terms on farmin' land than it does on timber land. Also gives him more acres in a farm claim than in a timber entry. But when the surveyors went through here, years ago, markin' off the timber claims they made a mistake once in a while an' listed some good pieces of timber land as not bein' wooded enough. Consequently such pieces are listed as farm lands. Now this piece here which I'm locatin' for you is one o' those mistakes. Why, Mister Hanson, when you prove up this claim, there's any number o' loggin' companies that'll give you from ten to twenty thousand dollars for the fir an hemlock standin' around. An' all I'm askin' for locator's fee is four hundred dollars. Lucky!"

"Now I got it," said Hanson, climbing off the seat. He rolled up his shirt sleeves and walked to the tail gate of the wagon, hoisting a trunk to his shoulders as if it were nothing more than a bundle of kindling wood. Slade watched him, his face showing its natural shrewdness. He appeared to be laughing to himself. Tying the reins around the brake handle he got down and followed Hanson to the cabin. Already the girl had a lamp burning in the place and was wielding a broom, a piece of cloth tied around her head. Slade watched her enviously for some minutes, at last turning to Hanson. "Come on and I'll show you the corner marks of your claim."

Hanson followed the locator obediently through the brush for fifty yards or more until they arrived at a tree with a big slash in the bark where certain numbers were carved. "This," said Slade, "is the northeast corner. It's gettin' late, an' I got to be strikin' for home; but I'll show you the other corners if you want. They're 'way off across a ravine. Be an hour's good hard walkin'."

"No," decided Hanson, letting his hand rest on Slade's shoulder. "I belief you to be an honest man. I take your vord."

"Sure," asserted Slade, heartily. The mere weight of Hanson's arm was heavy, and Slade moved aside. "In a week or two," he added, leading the way back to the cabin, "after you've got squared around you can go out to the land office and file your entry papers. Meanwhile you're livin' on the claim, and that's possession enough. But, say, I been curious to know what dragged you 'way off from Minnesota."

Hanson stopped by the cabin door and leaned against it. His face, turned

toward the moonlight, was owlishly solemn, and when he spoke it was as if wrenching something from the very bottom of his soul. "My vife died a mont' ago. Me, I couldn't stay in dot country no longer. Not after dot."

He entered the cabin and fumbled in his coat pocket. Out came a long, old-fashioned wallet; and, after adjusting a pair of ancient silver-rimmed spectacles, he counted out a layer of paper bills, shuffling them between his calloused thumbs to make sure. Slade, shooting a covert, sharp glance into the wallet, saw it to contain little enough wealth. He took the proffered bills with a nod of his head, at the same time producing pencil and paper. Bending over the table he scrawled a brief acceptance in the following words:

Rec'd for services as guide, four hundred dollars. T. SLADE.

"That," said he, passing the receipt to Hanson, "is the usual way us locators write it. All right?"

Hanson nodded. "I belief you to be honest. Vy should I vant anyt'ing more? Some day, Mister Slade, I do you such a good favor like you haf done me. May be you stay here overnight?"

"Oh, no," said Slade, quickly. "I'm a plumb busy man. Got to get back to town right off. So long! See you later." He shook Hanson's fist, withdrawing his hand quickly from the pressure of the latter's grip and looked for a moment at the girl as she bent over a trunk. Presently he was in the wagon and, with a farewell wave of his arm, turned the wagon down grade and was lost in the trees. He crossed a gravel ford and started onward with brakes screeching. A grin spread over his face, and he thumbed the money in his pocket.

"Well, Slade, old man," he muttered, "that was about the easiest sucker you found in a long spell. It'll be a month before he finds out he's been fooled. Then he'll clear out 'thout squealin', rather'n let folks know what an easy mark he's been. I can spot the right fella every time. Give me the slow kind." He chuckled and urged the horses to a faster gait as they came to the foot of the grade. It had turned dark, with a bright moon trying to pierce the heavy mat of boughs overhead. Somewhere in the distance a mountain cat screamed, and the horses lunged against the wagon tongue. Slade gave them a free rein, relapsing to pleasing reverie. And ever and anon he had the vision of the girl's yellow hair.

Back in the cabin the girl had made a cold supper, using the top of the trunk as a table. Her father had disappeared somewhere outside, and going to the door she raised her voice to a clear, silvery call. Hanson rose suddenly from his knees, not far away, the moonlight vaguely displaying his broad, owlishly solemn face.

"Papa," said the girl, "it's time to eat. What have you been doing?"

He came up, ducking his head to pass the door. "I was prayin' for mama," he answered. "She always vanted to live vere there vas trees. Yah."

"Papa!" cried the girl, suddenly turning away. But whatever she meant to say was never said, and after a moment she sat down beside him on a chair that was nothing more than a butt of a log. Hanson ate slowly, his face gradually resuming its serenity. The man was so utterly straightforward and simple in his thoughts that he could, in a little while, beam happily over the empty plates.

He pulled a pencil stub from a pocket and began figuring on the top of the trunk. "Ever since I vas a younker," he mused, "I vished to live in trees. Vell, here ve are. Dot vas a good faller, dot Slade. Yust t'ink—three-four years an' ve vill be vort'

maybe ten t'ousan' dollar. I vish mama——"

"Papa," interrupted the girl, "how much money have we left? It's nearly all gone, isn't it?"

Hanson beamed. "Now dot's notting to vorry over. Ve ain't got much, but your papa's arm ain't forgot how to do a day's vork. His earnin' days ain't over yet. An' ven ve get the claim proved, den ve'll be rich, you bet."

"I wish——"

The sentence was cut short by a rapping at the threshold; and a new voice, speaking slowly, came from the night. "Excuse me, but I saw the light through the woods and thought I'd drop over."

Father and daughter turned to see a tall young man, dressed in corduroy, stand leaning against the door. A stiff-brimmed army hat covered his head; but the lantern light, falling on his face, revealed a clean-shaven countenance burned brown by the sun. He had one of those hawklike noses and the wide, thin mouth of a fighter. His eyes, as they looked upon the two newcomers, became slowly regretful.

Lars Hanson rose awkwardly to his feet, spreading his hand with old-fashioned courtesy. "Ve vere yust havin' supper. Come in an' sit. Anna, ain't ve got a clean plate?"

"Thanks," said the young man, "but I've just put away a venison steak." He ducked through the doorway and removed his hat, sweeping the interior with an expression of one who had seen the place many times before. "My name's Jim Gunfleet. It's pretty solitary in these hills, an' a neighbor is somethin' to welcome."

Hanson stretched out his paw. "Me, I'm Lars Hanson, a veat farmer from Minnesota. Mister Gunfleet, howdeedo. Ever since I vas a younker I vished to live in trees. Vell, here ve are. Goin' to prove up on timber. Maybe you know the country around here."

"Raised in the hills," replied Gunfleet, eyes narrowing. "Did you say you figured to prove a timber claim? Near here?"

"Right here vere the cabin sits," answered Lars Hanson.

"Who brought you in?" demanded Gunfleet.

Hanson, placidly happy at his new fortune, did not notice the change of voice; but the girl looked up from the dishes, a sudden shadow passing her face. It was she who answered the question. "A man by the name of Slade," said she. "Do you know him?"

"Never met him," said Gunfleet; "but I've heard plenty. Folks, did he pass himself as a locator with a nice claim he'd show you for a sum o' money? It'd be, mebbe, the southwest eighty of section nine."

"Vy," exclaimed Hanson, surprised, "dot's the one. You know about it? Yah, I paid him four hoon'ert dollars. Dot vas a fine man, Mister Slade."

Gunfleet stood silent, his long fingers working at the brim of his Stetson. "An' he said this ground right here was a piece the Gov'ment had made a mistake about, listin' it as grazin' land?"

"Yes," said the girl, standing erect. One white hand went toward her throat. "Is—is there something wrong about it?"

Gunfleet, seeing the shadows deepen in her blue eyes, found it hard to answer. He nodded his head slowly. "I reckon you been fooled. It's an old trick. I guess Slade's brought five or six different parties up here in the last year. Passes this off as a bargain and gets money from 'em all."

Hanson stood uncomprehending, his face losing its happiness.

"But how can there be a mistake?" asked the girl. "There's timber here."

"Yes, but this isn't the section nine that he told you. That is over the ridge. And it hasn't a stick on it. Burnt over some years ago. It's an old trick. First he gets folks who are

green in the woods, and he shows 'em a nice piece and a few corner marks they can't read. He talks smooth, and he's got another feller in town who tells everybody he's as honest as the day is long."

"A hotel clerk!" said the girl. "A hotel clerk told dad he knew a man who had a bargain and introduced him to Slade."

"Yeah, it would be that way," said Gunfleet, growing more and more perturbed at her distress.

Hanson slowly settled on a stool, sighing heavily. His big hands folded together, and his shoulders began to droop. "Den I been fooled?" he muttered. "I took him for an honest man. The other faller said he vas honest."

"Sure," agreed Gunfleet, his eyes remaining on the girl. She was a woman after his own heart, no doubt of that! For even in the midst of such a misfortune—and he surmised shrewdly that they had spent most of their resources in coming this far—she had no words of bitterness. Courage and spirit were crystal clear on her face. She crossed to her father and put a hand on his shoulder. "Papa, it isn't anything to take so badly. We'll get on. Haven't we always made out? You cheer up. There must be land somewhere for us."

Hanson shook his head. "I ain't young like I vas once. Maybe there's land, but how's an old faller like me to find it? I t'ought he vas honest. I'm yust an old duffer, Annie. Dot faller took all our money."

Gunfleet closed his fist. "He's slick. Picks out his prospects mighty carefully and has his helper do all the advance work. This helper builds up Slade's reputation and then takes the prospect around. Yeah, I know because I met another party who'd been done just like that."

"Then why isn't he jailed?" demanded the girl. "If I were a man I'd horsewhip him out of the country!"

"He's mighty careful to keep on the right side of the law. Most folks don't care to say anything for fear it'll make them out as suckers. Those that try to fight don't have a bit of evidence. Did he give you a receipt for the money you passed over?"

Hanson fumbled in his pocket and wordlessly passed over the scrawl Slade had written. Gunfleet took one look at it and nodded. " 'In return for services as guide'—that's clear of all fraud, you see. Can't stick him on it. And as for tryin' to horsewhip the man—well, he takes care to keep out of sight for some little time until his victims leave. Anynow, he's rated as a pretty good shot, and it don't pay to mix with him unless folks mean to go the limit. How long ago did he leave here?"

"About an hour," said the girl.

Gunfleet figured. "That would put him beyond Six-mile Grade. I haven't got my horse with me, or we might catch up with him. Even so he'd be on watch. No, I reckon that four hundred dollars is gone."

"Yust an old faller," muttered Hanson. "Anna, I guess ve vill go some place vere I can get a yob as farm hand."

"No!" said the girl. "We'll fight this, somehow."

"Fine!" said Gunfleet, grinning for the first time. "Now, ma'm, I ain't ever interfered with another party's business. That ain't healthy in these parts. But if I could help I'd be handsomely pleased."

She straightened, and her blue eyes fell on him in a manner that made him turn hot and cold. He had the feeling that she had seen completely through him and had discovered every bad act he had ever done. He thought at first she was going to give him a polite refusal, for she started to talk politely, reserved. "Thanks, Mister Gunfleet, but we're proud people in our way. It never would do to bother other folks with

our troubles. Papa is strong, and I was never afraid of hard work." Then she stopped and looked again at his face. "What—what did you say your first name was?"

"Jim."

"Well, Jim, if you'd care to be our friend, I'd—I'd——"

Gunfleet drew a breath that threatened to tear the buttons from his coat and grinned broadly. "Ma'm, I'm handsomely pleased. I ain't ever seen this wampus cat Slade, but I've heard plenty; and I've a scheme in my head for some time for a case like this."

"What is it?"

Gunfleet shook his head. "Well, let's wait until I do a little figuring on it. Meanwhile there's no reason why you folks shouldn't stay here. This is government land; and they ain't goin' to chase you off, even if you can't use the timber. You've got food enough to last some weeks, and every blessed thing in the mountains is free for the takin'."

"Ever since I vas a younker of six——" muttered Hanson. But Gunfleet, still grinning, retreated to the doorway, hat in hand, eyes fastened to the girl. "Anyhow, Slade's not the only locator in the State. Ma'm, give me a few days; and I'll be back with better news."

She was smiling slightly, for the first time that eventful day. "I believe you," she answered. The golden hair shimmered under the lantern light.

He bowed low. "Don't you believe anything until I drive up the road again," said he, and, taking a last look at her clear face, he vanished in the dark.

Jim Gunfleet had told the truth to the girl. From his cabin across the cañon he had seen more than one duped party come and go. From some he learned of Slade's crookedness; from others he got highly uncivil receptions; and thus, by one rumor and another, he pieced the whole trick together. Being a man of normal shewdness and having much time to himself on his solitary perch among the firs, he had studied Slade's method and had come to certain conclusions. These conclusions he now proceeded to put into use.

Very early the next morning, after doing certain chores around his place and after spending some little time at the near-by creek, he started to town on his horse. Late in the afternoon he pulled up before a stable in that town, put his horse away and walked a little stiffly toward a small brick business office, taking care that he was not noticed entering a certain door in the building. When, at the end of a half hour, he came out it was to go straight to the rambling, old-fashioned Miner's Hotel near the depot. He registered with a flourish and looked up to find the clerk giving him a professional once over.

The clerk was a small, angular fellow with a toothpick in his lips and a mane of roached hair. He stared at Gunfleet's name on the register with an utter lack of interest and reached back for a key, saying in a tired voice, "Room twen'ny-two. Be a dollar-fifty, brother."

Gunfleet leaned over the desk, lowering his voice to a hoarse whisper. "Say, you got a safe? I want to salt away somethin'."

"Yeah!" said the clerk. "Pass it over." He had expected to see, possibly, a dog-eared wallet with a few gold pieces in it—country folks were suspicious of sleeping in a hotel room with much money around; but he was reduced to a state of shocked surprise when Gunfleet, diving into an inner pocket brought out a canvas poke as large as his capacious fist, bulging full. He slid it across the counter, looking hastily around him. "Just lock that away an' keep your mouth shut. Don't

want folks to know I've located a streak o' pay dirt in the hills."

"Gold dust?" inquired the clerk, half incredulously, near to swallowing the toothpick.

"The same," replied Gunfleet, uneasily staring at a few loungers in the corner of the place. "Enough of it to sink a ship where that came from. It's why I'm in town. Lonesome work, up there all alone. Takes more'n one man to handle a claim successfully. I'm lookin' fer a four-square gent with a few hundred dollars to invest in machinery."

The clerk narrowed his eyes and appeared to be staring at some remote place across the street. "Shouldn't be hard to find," he said, at last.

Gunfleet turned away to go up to his room. "Oh, I dunno. I ain't trustin' every son-of-a-gun that comes along. He's got to be honest. Well, you put that dust away for the time bein'."

The clerk nodded and turned to the safe. He turned the knob, shoved the poke of dust inside, and, in a fit of pure abstraction, locked the door. He was still in this hazy condition when Gunfleet, refreshed by a good wash came down and went out. The clerk watched him turn a street corner and, picking up a pen, began to scrawl aimlessly on the back of an envelope. "Huh," said he, then again, "huh." Right after this observation he raised his eyes to see Jackson McIntyre, a lawyer reputed to be well off from land and timber speculation, come hastily into the place. He was not an old man by any means, and the evening was not oppressively hot. Even so the clerk saw the suspicion of sweat on the man's brow.

"Say," muttered McIntyre, "is Jim Gunfleet here?"

"Stepped out," replied the clerk, switching the toothpick to another sector. "Went to put on the nose bag, I guess."

McIntyre made a noise that seemed like irritation. "Dog-gone his soul, I been on his trail for an hour. Didn't think a man could hide so easy in a place like this. Look here, if he comes back before I manage to find him, you say Jack McIntyre said for him not to close a deal with anybody. Just tell him that, and he'll understand. Remember, not to close a deal with anybody because I've taken him up. Get it?"

"Uhuh," muttered the clerk. "Say, what's goin' on here? Struck color somewhere?"

"None of your business," said McIntyre curtly and walked out as hurriedly as he had come in.

The clerk closed his eyes for a moment. "Oh, it ain't, huh?" he muttered. "I guess I can see a thing or two. Here's a prospect for Slade, or I'm a loony critter." He went around the desk and quickly climbed the stairs, stopping at a certain door and knocking. Without waiting for a reply he walked in, to confront the shrewd-faced Slade who sat by a window with a stack of magazines at his side and a box of cigars on the floor. He was in his shirt sleeves, feet propped on another chair, taking it easy after the recent windfall. The clerk drew up with a mysterious air and began to talk swiftly. Before he was halfway through Slade had gotten up and was slipping into his coat. "Gunfleet—Gunfleet," he repeated. "Ain't that the fellow who's provin' up a timber claim down on the Siuslaw? Yeh, sure it is. Well, kid, if it's to be a pluckin', your Uncle Abner will do it up brown. What's he look like?"

"Oh, one of these slow-goin' hombres. Seems suspicious as a treed coon, though."

"Well, go on downstairs and get busy," directed Slade. "That's the kind of a gent I can handle."

The clerk descended and took his place behind the desk. When Gunfleet

returned, bearing the attitude of a well-fed and entirely satisfied man, the clerk crooked a finger at him and leaned forward. "Listen, Mister Gunfleet, did you say you was lookin' for a partner? Not that I'm interested myself because that ain't my line. But I thought if I could do a good turn for a guest of the hotel I sure would speak up."

Gunfleet's eyes turned solemn and mysterious. "Ain't takin' any Tom, Dick, or Harry that comes along," he vouchsafed. "He's got to be honest, and he's got to have a little money to invest."

"Just the man," asseverated the clerk. "A fellow stoppin' here in the hotel now. Name's Slade, and he's a sort of gent that likes to cruise around the wood. Guess he's pretty well heeled. Anyhow he's a gent with a heart as big as a ham; and, if he ever did a dishonest trick in his life, well, it musta been before he hit these parts."

Footsteps sounded on the stairs; and the clerk, nudging Gunfleet, lowered his voice. "That's him comin' down now. Size him up yourself."

Gunfleet had his first glimpse of Slade, and, considering the evil reports he had of the man's trickery, he was surprised to see such a benevolent face. Slade was dressed in the rough clothes of the region, and a fat cigar was stuck in his mouth. Nodding carelessly toward the clerk, he went to a corner rocker and sat down, picking up a paper and becoming immersed in it. "If you want a partner," said the clerk, "there's the man. Of course, I dunno as he would be interested——"

"Well, if he ain't it's no skin off my knuckles," said Gunfleet in a voice just loud enough for the seated Slade to hear. "Anyhow I ain't in the humor to go bustin' up to strange people like that. There's plenty of chaps who'll be glad to look me up on the proposition. Thanks!" He made as if to go up to his room.

The clerk caught Slade's eyes over the top of the paper and was moved to a hurried offer. "Well, I'm a man who likes to help the patrons of this hotel. Good business for me. So just step over with me, and I'll introduce you."

"Oh, all right," said Gunfleet and allowed himself to be towed toward Slade. The latter raised his eyes from the paper in apparent surprise as the two came up and heard the clerk's introduction with a beam of good humor. He took Gunfleet's hand and pumped it vigorously. "Sit down," he boomed. "Always make it a habit to take it easy after eating."

"The gentleman," explained the clerk, "was lookin' for a partner in a little venture up in the hills. You bein' a guest of the hotel I figured it wouldn't do any harm——"

"Sure, sure," interrupted Slade. "Know that's my business, I guess, don't you? What's your line, Mister Gunfleet? Timber?"

Gunfleet moved slowly to a chair and fiddled with his hat as if slightly embarrassed. He drawled his words out one by one. "Nope, I got a little claim up in the hills. Pan out a smart amount of gold! But it's hard lines for one man. Need a partner with a little money to invest in tools. Sort of lookin' around for such a person."

"Hm! Gold is always risky stuff. Don't know as I ever gave it much thought. But I'm a born plunger. Always like to strike something new. If you could show me your claim and some of the dust you've panned I might—I say I might—be interested."

Gunfleet nodded his head at the clerk. "Mind bringin' out my poke from the safe?"

The clerk was all attention. He fetched the bag of gold dust in a hurry. Slade took it with pursed lips and a professional eye. Hefting it with his palm he became suddenly enthusiastic. "By George, it looks exciting. Mister

Gunfleet! Appeals to a restless son-of-a-gun like me. If I could see your claim I might be tempted to bite. How much money d'you figure you will need?"

"Thousand dollars," said Gunfleet.

Slade shook his head dubiously. "Of course you know, Mister Gunfleet, that's a lot of money to invest in a claim for half partnership."

Gunfleet took his poke and tied it together. "This," said he, "is ten days' work. I figure we could clear from twenty to forty thousand out of the creek in short order. But I ain't pressin' you. If you figure it don't suit your style I'll be on my way." He started to rise but was arrested by Slade's hearty laugh.

"By George, Gunfleet, you've hooked me! Yes, sir, hooked old Tom Slade, the plunger. Let's go down to your place in the morning. If it looks good to me I'll buy in as half partner, writing you a check for the thousand."

But here Gunfleet turned suddenly suspicious. "Check? Nope, I've been done on checks before. If you want to come in with me you just find a thousand cash somewhere and pack it along."

There was a commotion; and Jackson McIntyre, looking a little more heated than before, dashed in. "Where have you been?" he demanded of Gunfleet. "Looking all over for you. Come on to my office, and we'll close up the proposition we were discussing. I've changed my mind."

Slade looked as black as thunder. "All right," he said, "I'll find the cash." Gunfleet rose and spoke regretfully. "Why, Mr. McIntyre, I just give my word to this gentleman a minute ago. Wish you'd spoke earlier."

"What?" shouted McIntyre. "You gave me the proposition first!"

"Yeah, but you didn't bind the bargain then and there. Nope, I'll have to stick to my word. Mighty sorry, because I'd like to have you in. It's goin' to be profitable."

McIntyre looked as if he meant to explode. Presently he gathered himself and with a noncommittal bow left the hotel. Slade shot a triumphant glance at the clerk and rose. "All right, Mister Gunfleet, I'll be with you at daybreak."

"Yeah," said Gunfleet soberly. "Sorry about McIntyre. Sorta wanted him to share the luck. But he wasn't very anxious at first."

They started very early for the claim, Gunfleet and Slade, and reached it some time before sunset. Gunfleet might have taken his guest by a more direct route than he did; but he thought that in using the main trail he might have roused some of Slade's suspicion, for that trail led directly up to the Hanson family. So instead he took a circuitous route up hill and down dale until, after traversing a particularly dense piece of country, they arrived at a cabin set amidst the firs. A hundred yards below it dashed a mountain stream.

Slade dismounted from his horse and pointed eagerly down grade. "That the place? Let's take a look."

Gunfleet moved with an aggravating slowness. He unsaddled his horse and put him in a small corral; he washed his face and lit his pipe; he looked around the cabin to see if anything had been touched. This completed he joined the impatient Slade and moved toward the creek, drawling his words. "Ain't right at this point. Turn to the right on that path. It's up a couple hundred feet. Yeah! Now down. Take a look."

Slade, foremost, had reached the creek. He threw himself flat on his stomach and peered into the water, almost immediately exclaiming: "Godfrey, man! I see loose gold all along the bottom. Creek's filthy with it!

There must be a pocket farther up! Why, we'll put a sluice in here and work steady."

Gunfleet nodded. "Looks kinda pretty, don't it? Thought maybe you'd be interested. Point is, I don't want any crooks in with me. Got to be an honest man."

Slade laughed affably and rose from his stomach. There was an avidness in his face that no amount of acting could conceal. His hand went to his coat pocket.

"Well, let's go back to the cabin and get this dicker through. I've got to start for town immediately."

Gunfleet led the way to the cabin. Slade, sweat trickling down his face, took seat at the table and pulled out a long sheet of paper filled with closely typed words. Gunfleet stared at it with a frown, and Slade made haste to explain it. "Partnership form," said he. "I had a lawyer make it out for us last night so's to save time. It's just a matter of record. All it says is that you and I share and share alike on whatever comes out of this claim." He pushed a pen across to Gunfleet. "You sign right below my signature."

Gunfleet took up the formidable document and started to read. The farther he read the more perplexed was the expression on his face. Slade watched him covertly. As far as Gunfleet could see it was a vast jumble of "wherefores," and "parties of the first part," and commas, and semicolons. If he saw anything else in that contract he gave no sign of it. Picking up the pen he wrote his name quickly.

Slade went again to his pocket and brought out a pack of fresh bills. One by one he counted them out and passed them to Gunfleet, who thrust them carelessly in his pocket. He saw a sudden change of feature on Slade's countenance. There was no longer any attempt to be affable. Instead there was a glow of elation. The man rose and turned toward the door. "Well, I'll see you later in the week."

Gunfleet tamped down the tobacco in his pipe and spoke calmly. "Well, you bought a nice little piece of ground. Maybe if you tried hard you might get fifty dollars' worth of dust out of that creek."

Slade whirled around. "What's that?"

"I may be dumb," continued Gunfleet; "but I always read legal papers pretty closely. Knowin' how crooked you are I figured you'd try to do me dirt somehow. Wasn't surprised then to see you had put a joker in that contract. Makes you sole owner of the claim. Well, good luck to you. Hope you like the trout. That's all you'll get from that creek."

Slade poised a moment. "Mean you played me for a sucker?" he snarled. "Did you plant that creek?"

"Yeah! Sewed it with a poke of gold. Don't look so mad, you son of a gun! You bought a claim, and I got six hundred dollars, which is a fair price. Other four hundred goes to the Hansons, which sum you took away from them."

Slade had dropped one hand to his pocket and stood utterly still, his face turning to a peculiar grimness. "Oh, that's the trouble, eh? And I suppose McIntyre was in the scheme, too?"

"Just to string you along," said Gunfleet serenely. "That's one of your own tricks, Slade. Only this time your hotel clerk give you the wrong steer. Drop that gun!"

He had been watching Slade's hand, even as he talked; and he saw it streak toward a pocket and come out with the butt of a .45. The warning, however, was of no account for the next instant the man had sprung forward with the gun poised. Gunfleet, leaving his chair in a sudden dive, felt the room quiver with the shock of the exploding bullet and heard it crash into the farther wall,

passing directly above his head. Then his arms reached around Slade's waist, and the two went catapulting out of the door and to the ground.

It was a punishing battle. Gunfleet, young and vigorous, was surprised at the hardness of Slade's muscles. It was evident, too, after the first few seconds that Slade had been reared in an unscrupulous school of rough and tumble fighting. Gunfleet, atop of his opponent, was thrown off, and felt a sick and awful pain. The man's thumb jabbed into his cheek and missed his eye by a fraction of an inch. Roused to tremendous fury, Gunfleet reared back and pulled Slade with him; he got him around the throat and shook him like a rat. Slade's knee caught him on the hip; and then, poising for the briefest of instants, Gunfleet sent a cudgel blow into the man's snarling face. It sent Slade stumbling backward, jammed him up against a tree with a smash that was audible. Slowly he sank, half unconscious. Gunfleet picked up the fallen pistol and stuck it in his belt.

"Didn't know you had that much grit in you," he grunted, between breaths. "But when it comes to dirty work I reckon two can play. Now, Mister Slade, you can stay or you can leave. I'm pullin' out."

Slade raised himself on one elbow and glared. "Listen, kid, I'll have you jailed for this. Don't forget it!"

Gunfleet emerged from the cabin with a blanket roll and saddlebags. "On what ground? You wrote your own ticket. Nothin' in that contract about me promisin' you fifty thousand dollars' worth of gold. You figured to cheat me out of my half of the claim. Well, you did, only I wanted to sell; and six hundred was my price. Smoke that a while."

Gunfleet, smiling amiably, saddled his horse, strapped on his blankets, and mounted. With a farewell wave he vanished into the trees. Dusk settled down; and Slade, groaning softly, got to his feet and stumbled to the cabin. Presently he mounted and turned back for town, an angry, defeated man.

Jim Gunfleet, after an hour's riding on the trail, came again to the Hanson place and knocked at the open doorway. They were eating, and the girl, rising, turned a face to him that made his heart beat fast. She was smiling in a manner he had never seen a woman smile. He took off his hat and crossed the room to put a small roll of bills before the astonished Hanson. "I made a dicker with that fellow," said he, "sort of business deal that included returning your fee. Meanwhile, I'm suggestin' that you go to town this week and file on that burnt-over piece of land which Slade aimed to sting you with."

"Why?" asked the girl.

"Well," replied Gunfleet, grinning sheepishly, "about a month ago I found a streak of pay dirt, after lookin' better than two years. It's on that piece of land, down in the rocks by a creek. So you see Slade did you a good turn after all."

"It's not ours," said the girl. "It's yours."

"I was thinkin'," he answered, turning sober, "that it might be a partnership." And then he saw something on her face that made him throw his hat in a corner and draw one of the improvised chairs up to the supper table.

Your Dog

By David Post

Author of "The Papillon," etc.

THE SAMOYED

THE Samoyed, which arctic explorers brought to the attention of the world, is thought to be one of the oldest breeds in existence. Its native home is the vast tundra region of northern Russia and western Siberia. There, beyond the arctic circle, a nomadic tribe, the Samoyeds, has dwelt for centuries with almost no contact with the outside world. This people has developed a breed of dog adapted to the rigors of the arctic; Samoyeds have been used frequently by arctic explorers and have also been taken to the opposite part of the globe and employed in dashes toward the south pole.

On one of Shackleton's expeditions, eight Samoyed dogs, averaging only forty pounds each in weight, hauled a sled loaded with eight hundred pounds and two men forty miles in one day. This was extraordinarily good time over the rough antarctic ice fields.

In the barren and swamp lands of the arctic the Samoyed is guardian of reindeer herds. Usually the natives harness reindeer to their sledges; their dogs are companions and herders.

Centuries of domestication have made the Samoyed docile and good-natured. It gives no evidence of any wolf nature, is sweet tempered, and has a real doggy bark.

Children will find Samoyeds very companionable, for they are full of life and never vicious. Adults will admire them for their intelligence, their beauty, quick obedience, and willingness to work—if drawing sleds is required of them.

Pure white is the color most in favor here; creamy white also is to be seen occasionally. In the native country of the Samoyeds, color is not so important. There one may find dogs that are black, black and white, or brown and white, as well as the pure white or cream-colored ones.

Breeders in the United States are trying to produce Samoyeds that approach as near as possible to the following standard:

Head—Wide and flat between the ears and tapering gradually to the eyes. Although the head is wedge shaped and the muzzle clean-cut and fairly long, there should be no suggestion of the fox about the head. The head should look powerful; the muzzle should be tight-lipped, the jaws strong, and the teeth level.

Eyes—Dark and expressive.

Ears—Rather small, erect, set wide apart and inclined forward slightly but not so much so as those of the chow

or the Eskimo. The tips of the ears are rounded slightly.

Nose—Black or flesh-colored.

Chest—Wide and deep, so that there may be plenty of lung power.

Body—Deep-ribbed and muscular and not too short. The back should be straight.

Legs—Muscular, not too long, and having plenty of bone. The forelegs should be straight, the hindlegs powerful and set for speed and agility.

Feet—Long, well let down, with toes arched and close together. The feet are well protected by hair and by thick soles.

Tail—Fairly long, and carried over the back or side. The hair on the tail is long and plumelike.

Coat—A double coat. The under coat is soft and woolly; the outer is long and thick and stands well out from the body, especially on the back. The outer coat has a sheen which is characteristic of the breed. On the head and ears the hair is short and smooth.

Color—White or pale cream.

Size—Usually Samoyeds are not of greater height than twenty-three inches at the shoulder; measured from the tip of the nose to the root of the tail, they are seldom more than thirty inches in length.

Weight—About forty pounds.

General Appearance—That of an alert, agile, speedy, medium-sized, white arctic dog.

You have all read about huskies in stories of Alaska: I will tell you about their origin in my next article.

BIG TIMBER OFFERED BY GOVERNMENT

OFFERINGS for sale of ripe timber on approximately 1,196,353 acres of remaining land, formerly a part of the grant to the Oregon & California Railroad, and of approximately 93,000 acres of land, formerly a part of the Coos Bay Wagon Company grant in the State of Oregon were recently announced by the department of the interior.

The land included in the Oregon & California Railroad grant is situated in eighteen different counties and contains a stand of about 33,852,808,000 feet, board measure, of timber. The remaining tracts of the Coos Bay Wagon Company grant are situated in Coos and Douglas Counties, the stand of timber not being estimated.

In announcing the offerings, the General Land Office describes the various timbers found on these lands as yellow and sugar pine; red, yellow, and white fir; red and incense cedar and hemlock. Numerous compact bodies of these timbers are so situated that it is believed its purchase would be advantageous to small timber operators.

Sale of the timber lands is being made by the government through public auction or outcry, when prospective purchasers request that any particular tract be offered. Patent to the timber is also to be issued by the government after the purchase price has been fully paid, the purchasers to be given ten years in which to cut and remove the timber.

The Round-Up

IMMORTALITY, the dearest wish of every heart and mind! Is it the exclusive birthright of mankind alone, or may all of God's creatures strive for this, His supreme reward for those who have served Him?

Is there one among you who does not long to meet again his favorite horses and dogs, to have these wholesome and devoted friends his companions for eternity? We hear not one dissenting voice. We know that horses and dogs make life so much fuller and more supportable that the men and women who love them must hope and pray for their immortality.

With us this evening is Harry B. Woods, Pottstown, Pennsylvania. He has a wonderfully interesting and inspiring talk to give us on this subject.

Harry, you can gamble that there will be no whispering, even among those skylarking kids over there in the shadow, while you deliver—with all respect to the "cloth"—your sermon. Proceed:

"Boss of the Round-up and Friends: Around the campfire a few nights back, one hombre raised the question: Do we meet our 'hosses' in the unknown world beyond?

"I rebuked an Indian chief once for burying his son mounted on his pinto pony, since both of their spirits would be together in the happy hunting grounds. The story of that is from real life.

"Some thirty years ago, I packed mail in the Southwest, and my trail took me through the Comanche Indian country. Often I would ride into their camp at night, to thaw out my chilly bones. Yellow Bird, the son of Lone Wolf, and I became great chums. He used to ride with me to the railroad town to receive the mail.

"One day Yellow Bird was stricken ill. The medicine man prescribed the usual dope—a big noise to scare away the evil spirits. Day after day did they beat their tom-toms, while singing dismal chants. But it was of no avail. Yellow Bird passed into the happy hunting grounds of peace and plenty.

"The day of burial arrived. Dressed in the full war regalia due a great warrior, and mounted on his pinto pony, Yellow Bird was led by two Indian braves slowly down into a deep trench. Soon, many hands were throwing gravel into the excavation, while several redmen trampled it. As the gravel came up

to the pony's sides, he began to struggle to get free. When the pony had only his head free, he was shot. Then the trench was filled, until the rider was entirely covered.

"Some time later—with the levity of youth—I chided the old chief about burying the pony, saying that ponies' spirits don't go to the happy hunting grounds—also that Yellow Bird would not live any more.

"'Come, I show you,' he said, leading me to the brink of a cañon near by, which overlooked a broad, fertile valley. It was in the late fall of the year; the trees had shed their leaves, and the grass had taken on its winter coat.

"The chief pointed out an old snarling cottonwood. 'See that tree?' he asked. 'Yes,' I replied, 'it looks dead?' 'No, no, not dead—sleeps.' The Indian does not speak of those who have passed away as dead—but as sleeping. He said: 'The sap go into the ground. By and by, warm rain come, Chinook blow, and tree wake up. The dead grass, it wake up, too.'

"When he began to refer to the bear and other hibernating animals, my torpid mind was aroused, and I began to see that this poor, untutored savage was trying to prove by Nature that there was a resurrection and life beyond the grave.

"We read in the Good Book: 'Although you be as dead, yet shall ye live.' In Zechariah, first chapter, eighth verse: 'I saw in the night, and behold a man riding a red horse, and he stood behind the myrtle trees, and behind him were their horses, speckled and white.' Perhaps they were pintos.

"In Revelation, sixth chapter, second verse: 'And I saw a white horse, and he that sat on him had a bow.' Revelation, sixth chapter, fourth verse, and Revelation, sixth chapter, eighth verse, also speaks again of horses in heaven.

"Boss, although this is not conclusive evidence that we will fork our favorite cuttin'-out hoss in the spirit land, it shows that our red brother, with his simple faith, has a keener conception of life in the spirit land than we, of our boasted civilization."

Amen to that, we say.

Now from a man to whom Miss Mexico will take pleasure in listening. This man asks us not to introduce him under his real name—"Just call me Texican, from La Quemada, Jalisco, Mexico."

Here, then, is Texican. Always believing in fair play, we let 'em all have their say—and may the best man, woman, boy, or girl win.

"Boss AND THE BUNCH: In making my first appearance before the gang, I want to say that I am not in favor of being rough with horses or any animal, any more than with children. But there are times in life when it is necessary to be firm, and then I believe in having the proper articles to make a good job of it, so as not to have to repeat the operation every few days.

"In the case of the horse I fully agree with Miss Mexico in that there is nothing that will handle a bad horse like a Spanish or Mexican *gosne* or ring bit and a good pair of spurs. I have never been farther north than Missouri; know Oklahoma and was raised on the Texas border. I have never seen as well-reined horses elsewhere, as I have seen in old Mexico—horses broken by Mexicans with the same ring bits.

"As a rule, these horses are not tough mouthed. I have seen worse mouths on gentle horses in Missouri, where their mouths were torn up by sawing on them with a smooth snaffle bit, than I have ever seen on horses on whom a Spanish bit was used. I have seen some fine horses in Missouri, hand raised from a colt and ridden with a smooth bit. From

a rider's standpoint, they have about as much rein as the average buggy horse.

"I would not advise a person that is used to a smooth curb bit to use a Mexican ring bit, as this bit is not made to stand as much tugging on the reins as a smooth bit. They would probably have a horse rearing up and falling back on them. But, for a person that knows how to handle them, it is a bit that can't be beaten, and there is never any danger that a horse will run away or refuse to obey when using Miss Mexico's choice. Would like to hear some more from Spanish Bit on the subject."

J. Hill, him as hails from Oroville, California, knows a powerful amount about jerk teamin' and, like our friend who has just finished talkin', Hill makes his livin' at the game he's right now goin' to tell us about:

"Boss of the Round-up and Folks: Would like to tell you of some of the long-line horse-team trains we drive here, and some of our experiences, but it would take too long, so I will just skim over the subject.

"These outfits go wherever you can go with a one-ton truck; given a road eight feet wide, they ask for no more. The horses are hitched two abreast, one on each side of the fifth chain, and run as high as sixteen head of horses pulling three wagons. The span directly in front of the wagon are called wheelers; the ones on the end of the tongue are called pointers. The next span are called swingers, and all the others called line, except the last span which are called leaders.

"These animals display a knowledge that is almost human. Their driver rides one of the wheelers. All the driving is done with the voice and with *one* line and a whip called a blacksnake. Now here is where the auto-truck punchers can get a chance to howl! This blacksnake is about five or six feet long and is freely used on all occasions. Sometimes just the lash is used; it leaves its mark, and in the hands of these men that mark shows crimson; yet this lash is only made of buckskin. In some instances the butt is used, and when you remember that this whip tapers from the size of your little finger at one end to about one and one-half inches at the butt end, being loaded with bird shot all the way, you can get some idea of what I mean.

"The jerk line comes into play again when breaking the pointers, as the fate of the whole team is in their keeping. They must be broken to climb over that fifth chain, whenever called upon to do so, and not cease pulling for an instant while climbing. It doesn't matter how high the chain is, or how high and steep the bank, they *must* go. I have seen these horses trained for this work by the use of an iron nut, such as you see on the beams of a freight car. This is tied fast on the jerk line at a point where it comes right by their heads. When the driver says: 'Get over, Pete,' Pete immediately gets over. Otherwise the jerk line is swung so that the nut describes an arc, fetching alongside Pete's ear and knocking him over, while—as soon as he lands on the other side—that blacksnake picks him up and puts him up in the collar.

"These methods may sound, and are, brutal. I'll bet all I am worth that, if you put one of your tender-hearted motor-truck punchers out on one of those teams and let him leave the blacksnake and other methods behind, he would not complete one round trip without putting his whole outfit over the grade, besides wrecking his wagons and crippling or killing most of his stock.

"I hope that Miss Mexico and Spanish Bit hear this talk of mine as they evidently have both come up against the real West with all the glamour removed."

Miss Helen Rivers, who conducts this department, will see to it that you will be able to make friends with other readers, though thousands of miles may separate you. It must be understood that Miss Rivers will undertake to exchange letters only between men and men, boys and boys, women and women, girls and girls. Letters will be forwarded direct when correspondents so wish; otherwise they will be answered here. Be sure to inclose forwarding postage when sending letters through The Hollow Tree.

AUTUMN is here again with its crisp mornings and its gay woods, tempting the hiker, and camper, and all who love the open. "But," says one of the Gangsters who has ridden over to drop a note in The Tree, "while enjoying these fine fall days it seems to me a good idea to get some congenial pen pals, so one won't be lonely when winter sets in, and home, and fire, books, and letters are indispensable."

Judging from the number of varied requests in the Hollow to-day, lots of us ought to find that friend we've been looking for.

DEAR GANGSTERS: I've lived in Colorado practically all my life, so naturally I think it is about the only place on the map. Our climate is ideal, winters being mild; and we never suffer from heat in the summer. When it does get pretty warm all one has to do is to hike to the mountains near by, where one can always enjoy cool breezes.

Colorado is exceedingly fortunate in possessing a number of resorts that are different from the general run of summer resorts, but none are as picturesque as Platte Cañon, which is typical of Colorado. The wild, joyous music of the Platte River, one of the grandest of mountain streams, brings one into closer touch and understanding with nature. What can be grander than camping by a river and being sung to sleep by the rippling waters, and in the early morning taking a line and going fishing, catching the famous mountain trout for one's breakfast?

At the foot of Mount Genesee, near Denver, are situated fox-raising farms. Silver-fox farming, although comparatively new, is a rapidly growing industry. It is safe to say that not one person in a thousand has ever seen a silver fox, as these animals are as yet rare; and it is an interesting sight for tourists to visit these farms.

Colorado National Forest embraces one and one half million acres of the most wonderful mountain scenery in America. The scenic glacier region of the Colorado Rockies is situated in this forest. There are nine prominent glaciers in this region: the north and south Arapahoe, St. Vrain glaciers, Isabel Fair, Peck, and Roberts. You will be carried away by the awe-inspiring grandeur of the existing ice bodies, miniature icebergs, crevasses, and their rock flour that gives the emerald hue to their lakes. You will care nothing for their age, but will be like the Montana cowboy who, coming at night into the mountain region new to him and awakening in full view of a wonderful peak, gazed in silence with tears in his eyes, and, finally, throwing up his hands shouted, "Hurrah for God!" The work of nature is indeed wonderful in this glacial area.

The Denver mountain-parks system is located about fifteen miles from the city, and going to and from these parks most of the road is paved. The parks offer a variation of scenery and attractions. They not only invite the motorist; but the side trails and beauty spots appeal to the hiker, picnicker, and camper. In these parks are included a golf course and club house; a museum containing relics of Buffalo Bill, with his grave and Cody Memorial on the top of Lookout Mountain; an animal inclosure with about seventy-six elk, many buffalo, and mountain sheep; also playgrounds for children, shelter houses, and hundreds of fireplaces, tables, and chairs throughout the parks.

Should any of you be interested in hearing more about Colorado or exchanging snapshots and views I shall be glad to hear from you.

MRS. V. LOUIS MOORE.

1933 Washington Street, Denver, Colorado.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I am an Arizonian. At present I am in the smelter city, Douglas, but have been all over the State. Spent quite a while at the Grand Cañon, also across on the north rim. The great Kaibab forest is here with its two hundred square miles and less than seventy people. In this game preserve there are, it is estimated, around thirty thousand deer. An attempt was made not long ago to drive them down into the cañon and along the old Tamer trail to the south rim, but it resulted in failure.

Have been in the Buckskin Mountains, also to the natural bridge, Navajo Mountain, Tuba City, petrified forest, and spent a week down in the cañon along the mighty Colorado River. While in the cañon, thirty-five hundred feet beneath the rim at Grand View, I explored some caves which ran back almost a quarter of a mile into the earth. Have been in all of the border towns, Mexicali, Nogales, Agua Prieta, and Naco. Spent twenty-one months in the late war, fourteen of which were put in Over There.

I have lots of spare time and will write to any one—all welcome and no one barred. Will write again soon, describing some of the Indian tribes.

C. M. ARCHER.

Box 1139, Douglas, Arizona.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I wonder if I could get a looksee into The Tree. I have traveled quite a bit, seen the larger part of the United States, but have not visited foreign countries; I intend to do so before I quit rambling. Have traveled with several circuses and carnivals, and have done everything from eating fire to managing a show for myself. I claim to be a magician, but I can do most anything that is required in the average circus side show.

Will try and answer all letters I receive; would especially like to hear from those who've been with circuses, too.

H. L. JOHNSON.

Station Hospital, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

HELLO, FOLKS: I am looking for a pal, one who will stick. My home is in Massachusetts, but I am in Texas now. As soon as I get a car and equipment I expect to travel over the West and Canada. I feel that I can fill my part as a pal.

I have done quite a lot of professional boxing and sure love the game. Have had a college education. Hope to hear from some one soon who likes outdoor life and wants a pal who shoots straight. If you can box all the better.

"BUCK."

Care of The Tree.

Vern and Peggy, twins, of Missouri, have just loped up to get a couple of Hollow Tree emblems.

Don't you think it's time you were comin' forward, too?

Twenty-five cents in stamps or coin sent to The Hollow Tree, Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, will bring you either a button for your coat lapel, or a pin. In ordering be sure to state which you wish.

Mrs. Clara Snow, 8916 Fir Street, Los Angeles, California, is eager for Indian correspondents.

Here's an Aussie who'd like to hear from America: Syd F. Smith, 5 Inkerman Street, St. Kilda, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia.

"I am a lone wolf seeking a pen friend who likes mountains and plains. I have done everything from sailing to mining, and can give information on many subjects," writes L. S. Balter, care of S. A. Fillmore, Caldwell, Idaho.

Who'll write a lonely soldier, Private Edward G. Barowski, Battery G, Sec-

ond Coast Artillery, Fort Sherman, Canal Zone?

Mrs. Francis Fournier, 46 Sturtevant Street, Norwich, Connecticut, offers a home to a young girl who is without one.

"Letters from any one, any time, from anywhere," is the request of Gloria B. Russell, 122 West Sixty-first Street, New York.

A lonely Canadian boy, Lester McNevin, 1164 Angus Street, Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada, will appreciate letters.

Max Coleman, Lubbock, Texas, says, "I'll be glad to hear from people around Oceanside, California, the Hawaiian Islands, and those from any States who love the West. I spent several years in northwestern New Mexico just south of the Bad Lands."

Will sisters interested in the West and outdoor life write Mrs. E. Melville, and her daughter Ethel, 371 Taylor Street, Springfield, Massachusetts?

Nettie Mahanes and Margaret Sutton, both of Arma, Kansas, would like mighty well to have some cowgirl correspondents.

Another lonely soldier looking for mail is Carl H. White, Box 48, Schofield Barracks, Hawaii.

Mr. and Mrs. M. E. Dill, 1234 North Fourteenth Street, St. Louis, Missouri, would like to move West, and will be glad of information and advice about living conditions and employment there.

"I am at a radio station quite away from anything, and I get real lonesome. Won't some sisters write Mrs. H. G. Justus, care Radio Station, New Dungeness, Washington?"

Forney F. Colston, care of G. H. Richison, Route 5, McAlester, Oklahoma, will tell about Texas, Oklahoma, the Hawaiian Islands, punching cattle, wild West shows, and rodeos. Who'll write?

"If there are any questions any of the Gang wants to ask about the coast guard I'll try to answer them," offers Robert A. Young, Picket Boat 2353, Section Base 10, Washington Harbor, Washington. "I have been too long on the deep blue to write much of the land; but I've traveled four times around the world, covered twenty-eight of our States in six months; so if anybody's interested get busy and write."

Will sisters in Mexico or Minnesota get in touch with Mrs. Mae Sockness, Rural Route 6, Madison, Wisconsin?

Miguel de Campos Barros, Ponte-Nova, Minas Geraes, Brazil, South America, would like to hear from some American boys his age—nineteen.

R. T. Bellenger, Defoe Street, Punchbowl, New South Wales, Australia, is twenty, interested in everything, and desirous of correspondents from anywhere. He'll tell about his country.

If you want an English correspondent write Fred R. Elliot, 63 Saxon Road, Selhurst, London, South East, England. "If any of you Gangsters are coming over here don't miss Devonshire and Cornwall," says he. "Am just back from a business tour in these two beautiful counties."

Here's your chance if you want a pen friend in Alaska:

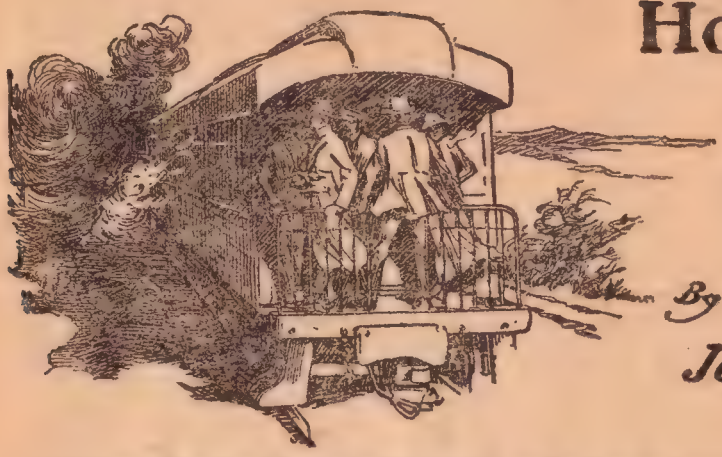
DEAR MISS RIVERS: I am located at a small mining camp inland from Nome, Alaska. I have been on many hunting trips for moose, caribou, bear, and out to the coast on seal and sea-lion hunts, which are great sports. I am but twenty-two and have had many experiences for my time in Alaska, which is six years.

I am lonesome and would like to have some of The Gang write, the more the merrier.

LEO L. TANGEN.

Chomly, Alaska.

Where To Go and How To Get There



By John North

It is our aim in this department to be of genuine practical help and service to those who wish to make use of it. Don't hesitate to write to us and give us the opportunity of assisting you to the best of our ability.

Address all communications to John North, care of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

RIVERS OF THE WEST—THE COLUMBIA'S FUR TRADE

THE Columbia River, long sought for by explorers under its old name of the Oregon River, was rather slow in its development from the pioneer stage on account of its distance from the centers of population. The early part of its history contains records of tragedy and heroic achievement under apparently insurmountable difficulties; until finally, by reason of its scenic grandeur, the mystery of its origin, the swiftness of its flow through some of the wildest and most beautiful country, its dense forests and its fertile soil, the region of the Columbia River became an attraction for the homeseeker, the scientist, and the lover of nature.

Many a discovery of importance to the world can be traced to the activities of fur hunters, for they have had to penetrate the wilderness and unknown forest areas in search of fur-bearing animals, who favor only uninhabited regions; and so the development of the Columbia is actually due to the search for furs made by the various fur companies, who were all rivals for new fields. Of these the only one that has survived is the famous Hudson's Bay Company, which absorbed the Northwest Fur Company and some smaller concerns, and still holds its own.

As colonization and settlement, with the consequent establishment of agriculture and commerce, was much more rapid in the United States than in Canada, the fur interests of the Columbia were pushed northward. The many fur-trading posts of the American companies were gradually given over to other purposes, their owners drifted into enterprises that were less hazardous; and flourishing villages, and finally busy cities, sprang up on the sites of the old posts; and forests were demolished to make room for homes and factories.

During the successful years of the fur traders, the various forts and trading posts were visited by brigades

of boats up and down the river, from the southern shores of Hudson Bay, through Manitoba, to the crest of the Rockies at the head of the Columbia. Water was used for this commerce to as great an extent as possible; but there were many portages, through woods and over mountains, where horse power, and especially man power, were employed.

Once afloat upon the Columbia, the hardy boatmen braved most of the rapids, occasionally meeting with disaster and paying for their temerity by the loss of men and furs. But their skill was such that these accidents were rare; and the trip from Boat Encampment to Fort Vancouver, over one thousand miles, was generally made safely, or with only a few minor setbacks.

The boatmen were French Canadians, many of them partly Indian, knowing the forests as a city man knows his streets, and having a complete mastery of the most turbulent waters. Descending the river was a comparatively easy task, but the ascent was difficult and took much longer. The first journey of the Northwesters from Astoria to Montreal was made in 1814; and it took from April 4 to May 11, to reach the mouth of Canoe River, the point at which they entered the mountain climb to the head of the Athabasca. These men were considered the best boatmen in the world and their fame has continued to this day. Their descendants are still the only beings who can master white water and shoot dangerous rapids with safety in a canoe.

The boatmen who brought furs from the far North down the Columbia in the old days would guide their canoes across lakes, down rapids, and around rocks against which the dashing waters beat, with a skill and a certainty that appeared miraculous and incredible to the less daring and experienced. They would run all the rapids from Death Rapids to the sea, making portages at the falls; and in ascending the river they had to carry their boats and equipment around all these points.

The boats used by these voyagers were generally cedar-log canoes made by the Indians. They were sometimes sixty feet long and would hold from six to twenty persons, with loads from half a ton to three tons. The canoes were so light that two men could carry one of medium size, while four could handle the largest of them and could carry them over the most difficult portages.

A journey upon the Columbia River may begin at its source in the Canadian Rockies and end at the Pacific Ocean. In that distance it is fourteen hundred miles long by the windings of the stream, and descends twenty-five hundred feet, so that it is remarkably swift in many places; yet the entire length of the river can be covered in a small boat, just as was done by the voyagers of the old days. This is a favorite summer trip with many adventurous vacationists who enjoy the delights of roughing it and emulating the fur bearers, whose songs they sing as they paddle down the river.

At the Continental Divide in the heart of the Canadian Rockies, there are two streams of water divided by a little wall of stone. One branch goes east and flows into the Bow, thence into the Saskatchewan and on to the Atlantic. The other branch runs west through the tributaries of the Wapta to the Columbia, and on to the Pacific Ocean.

At the parting of the streams a rustic sign bears the significant words, "The Continental Divide."

MISSING

This department conducted in duplicate in DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE and WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, thus giving readers double service, is offered free of charge to our readers. Its purpose is to aid them in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable. Because "copy" for a magazine must go to the printer long in advance of publication, don't expect to see your notice till a considerable time after you send it.

If it can be avoided, please do not send us a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that those persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

New, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

ELLER, J. J., or P. H. CARLISLE.—Please let me hear from you. L. K. Hawkes, 540 Dayman Street, Long Beach, California.

WILLIAMSON, DELBERT.—About fifty years of age, six feet tall, gray hair and brown eyes. Last heard of in California. Please write to Julia E. Taylor Poulsen, care of C. Stilling, Flandreau, South Dakota.

MAULEY, SURRY L.—His home was in McKinney, Texas, before the war. Would like to hear from you. Address L. M. S., care of this magazine.

C. L. F.—Your father and I are divorced. I have important news for you. Send your address. Mother, Box 104, Mancos, Texas.

WOOD, SARAH.—Left her two small half brothers with her mother's people in Henry County, Missouri. She would be about seventy years old. One of the half brothers, Henry, would like to hear from his father's people. Communicate with Mrs. W. O. Groene, Box 142, Handley, Texas.

HULL or ELLIOTT, MAMIE.—Lived in Newark, New Jersey, in 1886. Later moved to Baltimore. An old friend who has tried for years to find her would be grateful for any information. J. J. M., care of this magazine.

HOUSTON, EDITH ROSS.—Tall, black hair and eyes, about thirty-eight years old. I have news for you. Please write. Irene, Box 62, Udell, Iowa.

POORE, DOLLIE, or DORIS EVANS.—Age forty-five. Last heard of at Roslyn, Washington, in 1905. Any information will be greatly appreciated. G. W. Walters, P. O. Box 358, Moscow, Idaho.

HUITT, R. K.—Seen at Monument, New Mexico, about seventeen years ago. Any information as to his whereabouts will be gladly received by his brother, C. B. Huitt, Eastland, Texas.

C. W. M.—You did not understand. I want you. Sunshine, P. O. Box 949, N. N.

O'BRIEN, WILLIAM JOSEPH.—Last heard of at Bryant, Washington. Married Julia Wooldridge in 1901. His sister would like to hear from him. Kate, care of this office.

GUERRA, CARLOTTA.—Mexican. Has a little girl twelve years old named Conchita Luna. My mother is white, has brown eyes, and is five feet four inches. Last heard of in 1921 in California. Her son would like to get in touch with her. Daniel Luna, Route B, Box 353, Kingsburg, California.

SCOTT, ROSELLA BABE.—Would like to hear from you. John H. Scott, Station A, Box 182, Lansing, Michigan.

KUCERA, ADOLPH.—Formerly of Seattle and Alpha, Washington. Father is dead. Please write to your sister, Anna S. Kucera, 673 Johnson Street, Portland, Oregon.

ATTENTION.—Would like to hear from any one who served in the A. F. G. with the Fifth Infantry. I was cook in Company A, and later a private in Service Company. John D. May, 799 First E. H. Street N. E., Linton, Indiana.

JOHNSON.—Was a blacksmith in Service Company, Fifth Infantry, at Andernoch, Germany. Last seen at Fort Slocum, New York, in 1921. Please write to your old buddy, John D. May, 799 First E. H. Street N. E., Linton, Indiana.

MACK.—Formerly connected with the Florida East Coast R. R. at Fort Pierce, Florida. Please write to your old friend, Marie, P. O. Box 611, Gainesville, Florida.

POLLARD, R. J.—Painter and paper hanger. Last seen in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1913. Please write to your brother, John Pollard, care of Extra Gang No. 3, Vanada, Montana.

HAMILTON, LEWIS.—Formerly of Trenton, New Jersey, and Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Please write to W. House, 1211 W. Hill Street, Louisville, Kentucky.

BROWN, GERTRUDE SPRANGE.—Formerly of St. Joe, Missouri. Last seen in Chicago, Illinois. Please write to Dorothy Kilroy, 815 Buchanan Street, St. Louis, Missouri.

SULLIVAN, EMMETT, and DEWEY COWLING.—Your niece and cousin would like to hear from you. Mrs. Florence E. Brookshire, Box 195, Covington, Oklahoma.

SNIDER, JIM.—Sixty-five years old. Was working on a farm in western Texas in the fall of 1924. His daughter would like to hear from him. Mrs. Leeta Titus, Box 386, Cromwell, Oklahoma.

BOARDMAN, E. A.—Left his wife and two children about nineteen years ago. When last heard from he was in Kansas. His daughter is anxious to hear from him. Mrs. Arthur Wright, 306 East Chestnut Street, Springfield, Missouri.

READ, ETHEL M.—Was a nurse in England during the World War. Last heard of at Peoria, Illinois, in March, 1922. Any information will be greatly appreciated. Francis J. Donohue, Q. M. Corps, Chilkoot Barracks, Alaska.

WAGNER, WILLIAM JAMES.—Left home five years ago. Heard from July 30th, three years ago, from Tacoma, Washington. Letters sent there were returned. Please write to your mother, who is worried about you. Mrs. Bessie Wagner, care of Miss Blanche Lang, Lock Box 53, Woodsfield, Ohio.

ESCO or ROSCHESE, LUKE.—Age fifteen, heavy build, dark complexion, brown hair, dimples, and black eyes. I am ill and would like to hear from you soon. Mrs. Filomena Noschese, Box 606, Ellwood City, Pennsylvania.

PUNTIN, FRANK.—Disappeared from home June 13, 1926. Fifteen years old, five feet three inches tall, stockily built, large hands, dark-brown, heavy hair, brown eyes, slightly cast, even teeth, and a merry smile. Any word of this boy will be appreciated by his anxious mother. All forgiven if he will only write. Mrs. Margaret Puntin, 162 West Seventy-eighth Street, New York City, New York.

TRUAX, MALCOLM.—Left home over thirty years ago. Your mother would like to hear from you. Letters sent to Gibson, Oklahoma, were returned. Any one who knows anything about him please write to Mrs. Jana Truax, R. R. 2, Vassar, Michigan.

JENSEN, EINAR.—Last heard from at New Orleans a year ago. Your friends at Sarasota, Florida, would like to know your whereabouts. A. Ketelsen, Box 1242, Sarasota, Florida.

D. P.—Am very worried. Willing to do more than my part to get along. The babies need your love and help. Please come back. We are in Henryetta, Oklahoma. Your wife.

HAMILTON, PAUL J. or PATRICK J.—Last seen in Newark, New Jersey. Age forty-five, married, and has four children. Has also lived in Sidney, New York. Wanted very much. Daisy R. Leacock, care of this magazine.

AVERY, GILBERT.—Age twenty-one. Born in Alma, Nebraska. Left there July 21, 1925, and taken to a home in Omaha, Nebraska. Please write to your sister, Mrs. Grace Tanner, Box 201, Alma, Nebraska.

MIRES, BILL.—Would like to hear from you. Reba, care of this magazine.

CORNELISON, JESSE.—Irish descent, red hair, crippled in one foot. Last heard of in 1920 in Oklahoma. Write to your old friend, M. R. Buchanan, P. O. Box 156, Jacksonville, Texas.

ROY.—Have some very important news for you from your wife and baby. Please send your address. Sis.

WOODWARD, Mrs. RUPERT.—Last heard of at Ft. Worth, Texas. Please send your address to Mrs. W. P., care of this magazine.

YOUNG, ELLA.—Of Phelps County, Missouri. Left me at the Children's Home Society of St. Louis, in 1899, when I was about a year old. Would appreciate any information concerning her. Please write to Bertha Byrd, care of this magazine.

EARTHMAN, FLOYD.—Last heard from in 1923 at Gunter. Please write to us. Ed, Earth, Texas.

REYNOLDS, BERT J.—If you could only know how I care for you in spite of all. Won't you please let me hear from you? M. G. J., care of this magazine.

DORTON, VERN.—About twenty-four years of age, brown eyes and black hair. Formerly of Salt Lake City, Utah. Have not heard from him in two years. Ann Hammett, 1435 Florida Street, Long Beach, California.

A. A. A.—Write at once and give address. Dad.

SMITH, EVA.—Lived at Detroit, Michigan, in 1915 or 1916. Later went to Ashtabula and Cleveland, Ohio. J. Smiley, 4900 S. Wabash Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

REEDER, FLOSSY.—Believed to be living on a ranch. Please write to Joe Altames, Box 409, Donora, Pennsylvania.

JAMES L.—Everything O. K. Write at once to Louise and me. Can pull together. Quien sabe? Chick.

LOCHEMES, CLARENCE and NORMAN.—Last heard of at Los Angeles, California. Have news for you. Please write to Mrs. Helen Hagenau Nelson, 2522 Vine Street, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

BERT.—A student of S. D. S. Agriculture and Mechanic's College, at Brookings, South Dakota. Please write to your friend, "Billie," of Texas, care of this magazine.

MATHIS, SARAH.—Last heard from in 1918 at Millville, New Jersey. Please write to Edgar C. Lee, 228 S. Bancroft Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

POTTORFF, WRAY RUSSELL, Jr.—Why don't you write home? If you are working, it is all right. Daddy and I are almost frantic. We are in Kansas now, but Cecil will send your mail to us. Mother.

ROBERTSON, JAMES H.—Last heard from three years ago at Olean, New York. Was a pipe fitter for the Pennsylvania Railroad. About five feet six inches tall, dark-brown eyes, sandy hair. Please write to your mother, Mrs. H. D. Mann, 314 Rutger Street, St. Louis, Missouri.

TUCKER, FREDERICK SYLVESTER.—Age thirty-four, tall and fair. Of Bozeman and Butte, Montana. Last heard of five or six years ago at Denver, Colorado. Father has been sick for over four years and would like to have news of him. Please write to Beatrice M. Tucker, Box 106, Dayton, Oregon.

WATSON, Mrs. TOM.—Lived at Clarksville, Texas, in 1919. Please write to P., care of this magazine.

I. S. G.—Please send for me before it is too late. Let us try again under different circumstances. If not, please let me know that you are O. K., for I will always care. R.

McCONNELL, JIM.—My last letters to you were returned. Please send your address. Regardless of what has happened, I am still your friend. J. L. Haley, R. 4, Box 93, Lubbock, Texas.

SHELLEY, ALBERT L.—Last heard from at Burns, Oregon, in 1925. Was in partnership with Fred Thistell, on a forty-acre ranch. Is thirty years old, blond hair, blue eyes, and fair complexion. Any trace of him will be appreciated by his family, and his anxious mother. Mrs. Anna Shelley, Freeland, Washington.

ZORTMAN, Corporal.—Was with Company A, Twenty-ninth Engineers, at Fort Humphrey, Virginia, from 1922 to 1925. Please communicate with your old pal, Private James F. Greer, Battery C, Thirteenth Field Artillery, Schofield Barracks, Hawaii.

FALDOWSKI, EDWARD.—Was honorably discharged from the Marine Corps, May 8, 1914, at Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Later lived at Brooklyn, New York. His mother, sister, and brother in Poland would like to locate him. Address his cousin, A. Faldowski, care of Mascarel Hotel, 807 Summit Avenue, Los Angeles, California.

JOE E. C.—Left his wife and two babies. Young, medium height, weighs one hundred and thirty-five pounds, dark hair, gray eyes, heavy eyebrows, scar across nose, left-handed. Any information will be gratefully received by his wife, Mrs. J. E. C.

GARDNER, M. L.—Last heard of at Steilacoom, Washington. Any one knowing his address please notify Dick Gilliam, 43 Blake Street, Greenville, South Carolina.

WOLF, WOOLWINE.—Formerly of Virginia. Attended Marshall College at Huntington, West Virginia, in 1921-1922. Any one knowing his whereabouts please communicate with his old pal, who wishes very much to hear from him. Thomas R. Sawyer, U. S. S. "Camden," New York City, New York.

PINNEY, PEARL B.—Sixty-three years old if he is living. Over six feet tall, birthmark on neck, little fingers on each hand crooked. Last heard of in 1885 from Dickinson, North Dakota. Please write to E. M. H., care of this magazine.

BRIGGS, ALFRED.—Left Aurora, Illinois, in the fall of 1923, for Sacramento and San Jose, California. Would like to hear from you. Harry O. West, U. S. S. "Procyon," care of postmaster, San Francisco, California.

JOSEPH, CARL LEVANT.—Left Corning, New York, August 8, 1923. A few days later joined the navy at Detroit, Michigan, using the name Beclent. He is twenty-five years old, dark hair and eyes, about six feet tall, and weighs about one hundred and seventy pounds. No reason for leaving home or changing his name. Any information will be greatly appreciated by his father, E. G. Joseph, P. O. Box 245, Corning, New York.

PARSONS, ROLLAND R.—Last heard from at Frankfort, Indiana. Please communicate with Pierce W. Campbell, East Passaic Avenue, Bloomfield, New Jersey.

MAY.—I want to get in touch with my mother, whose first name is May. She left me with relatives about thirty years ago. Thelma, care of this magazine.

BEASLEY, MINNIE C.—Come back to me. I love you and will forgive you. Write to me and I will come to you. A. W. B., 305 Eleventh Avenue E, Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

JEAN.—Please write to me. I don't know what to do about our marriage. Blossom, 1504 Military Street, Port Huron, Michigan.

BURGE, CLARENCE CLYDE, and RUSSELL LOWELL.—They will receive valuable information if they will write to their brother, James R. Burge, U. S. Naval Hospital, Mare Island, California.

W. H. W.—There is an important letter for you at this office from O. M. L.

ARKLE, JOHN.—Please communicate with F. W., care of this magazine.

GORTNER, WARDER JOHN.—Served with me in Siberia, Philippines, and Honolulu. His home was at Victor, Iowa. Have not seen him since May, 1922. Please write to your old friend, Chick, care of this magazine.

McCUEN, EDDIE.—Of the Third Signal Corps, Camp Lewis, Washington, during 1922 and 1923. Please write to your friend, Edith of Olympia, Washington.

STUMP, HOWARD.—About twenty years old now. Was taken away from his mother when five years of age. Last heard of at Kansas City. Any one knowing him please write to E. E. Brown, 505½ Holly Street, Bellingham, Washington.

QUATTLEBAUM, J. L.—Of Louisiana. Last heard from in 1924. Please write to your nephew, Robert L. Quattlebaum, Holly Bluff, Mississippi.

WIGGINTON, Mrs. M. A.—Lived in Pocatello, Idaho, in 1918. Please write to your brother, Gene Lawson, Battle Mountain, Nebraska.

DE GROAT, JAY.—Please come home. Your father has heart trouble and wants to see you. Your sister, Mrs. Lucy Smalley, Route 3, Blanchard, Michigan.

J. E. J.—Will you write to me at once? R. B. J., Box 26, Watkins, New York.

WILLIS, MONROE.—Last heard from at Bridgeport, Tennessee. His son, who was adopted when a baby, would like to hear from him. Address Merritte, care of this magazine.

KEARNS, or CAIRNS, PHILIP and LIZZIE.—Last heard of at Alder Springs, California, several years ago. Please write to your brother, Bill Cairns, care of Mrs. J. F. Nedwed, Route 3, Westmoreland, Kansas.

DURMAN, LACEY.—Please write to an old pal. W. T. Bain, Box 234, Sebring, Florida.

HEATON, HUBERT.—We separated in Pulaski, Virginia, in 1924. Please write to me, as I want to join you at Mr. Devers Sullivan at the same time and place. A. P. Cales, Box 234, Sebring, Florida.

DOLPH or SULLIVAN, ARTHUR E.—Sandy, curly hair. Nearly six feet tall. Works as brakeman or switchman. His wife would like to hear from him. Mrs. M. Dolph, 1631 Lincoln Avenue, Kalamazoo, Michigan.

BASHELIER.—Would like to hear from any one by this name, or their descendants. Mrs. F. S. Caldwell, Box 564, Idabel, Oklahoma.

MULLER or MULDER, ISAAC.—Stopped at Parsons, Kansas, on way to California, in 1894 or 1895. Address Mrs. F. S. Caldwell, Box 564, Idabel, Oklahoma.

CHASE, LOUIS T.—Please write to Dot, care of this magazine.

MEYER, OSCAR J.—I have changed my address. Please write to me in care of this magazine. Dot.

LEONA.—Colored. Last name unknown. Left her baby daughter, Minnie, with Mrs. Carrie Wright Holmes, at Syracuse, New York, about 1897. Later she went to Utica, and Minnie was taken to Newark, New Jersey, with her foster parents, and all trace of her mother was lost. Any information would be gratefully received. Address Minnie Holmes, 73 Lawrence Street, Brooklyn, New York.

FLOYD.—Your mother is very ill and needs you. Please write something definite. I am still waiting for you and hoping you will succeed. Dollie.

LONGHURST, WILLIAM.—Left home near St. Jacques, Michigan, September 18, 1904. Fifty-three years of age, tall, blue eyes. His daughter would like to find him. Mrs. Minnie Nelson, R. F. D. Box 7, Gladstone, Michigan.

BUTKOVICH, JOHN M.—Please come back to your wife and baby. I forgive you for all. Mrs. Mary Butkovich, 1712 Mass Street, Gary, Indiana.

SCOTT, RUTH MILLER, and JOHN HOWARD.—Their three children would like to find some trace of their parents. I was born February 15, 1879, at Fayetteville, Arkansas. Flora Scott O'Neal, 310C N. Polk Street, Amarillo, Texas.

GEORGE.—Mother passed away May 23, 1926. I still care for you. Trust me and write. Marie, care of this magazine.

DATER, GLENN EDWARD and HAROLD.—Were adopted from the Children's Home at Topeka, Kansas. Glenn has gray eyes and brown hair, Harold is a blond. Father a patient at the World War Veterans' Hospital. Sight of his children will aid his recovery. Address J. C. Dater, 821 Picher Avenue, Joplin, Missouri.

YOST, IRA.—Last heard from in Michigan, about 1883. Sisters Beckie, Maria, and Ella still looking for news of him. Address any communication to Mrs. Mabel H. Knight, 13416 Woodworth Road, East Cleveland, Ohio.

SIMMONS, JIM.—Small stature, blue eyes, light hair. Last seen in Tampa, Florida, in 1909. Father, dear, I still love you and want to hear from you so much. Address Mrs. Schiovlet Butler, 2307 Lawrence Avenue, Toledo, Ohio.

HUSTON, JOHN.—Last heard of at Pueblo or Trinidad, Colorado, working for the railroad. Over six feet tall, weighs over two hundred pounds. Lost track of through a misunderstanding. Any information will be thankfully received. E., care of this magazine.

BORDEAUX, PHILIP H.—Nearly six feet tall, sandy hair, scar on left cheek, fifty-four years old. Was ill when he left home, June 4, 1926. Any information will be appreciated by his wife, Mrs. P. H. Bordeaux, R. F. D., South Spencer, Massachusetts.

GORMLEY, PETER.—Last heard of in California. Please communicate with L. H., Box 6959 G. P. O., Miami, Florida.

FAIRCHILD, CHARLES F.—Very anxious to locate any relatives of his, as I have important information for them. Address C. G. Miller, Box 3, Kingman, Kansas.

GIBSON, Mrs. MARY JOSEPHINE, FRED, and ADDIE.—Once lived in Faulkner County, Arkansas. Last heard from at Pottsville, Arkansas. Information as to whereabouts appreciated. Guy Phillips, Box 193, Fletcher, Oklahoma.

M. R.—Of London, England. Please write. "Oklahoma Boy," Fletcher, Oklahoma.

BEEZLEY, ELMER or BERT.—Last heard of eleven years ago. His father will appreciate any news. Tom Beezley, Colorado, Texas.

T. Y. O. H.—If you still care for Sonny and me, write at once. Restaurant sold; everything all right. Will explain everything in letter to you. "The Kid."

SPINNER, KATHERINE.—Last heard from three years ago. Mother forgives you and wants you to come home or write. You have a baby sister who is six months old. Write to your sister, Mrs. Bertha Walters, 733 Wall Street, Akron, Ohio.

HOWARD, JOHN.—Worked and went to school with me in 1924 at Reedsport, Oregon. Write to an old friend. Private Hubert Hatfield, Battery A, Fifteenth Coast Artillery, Fort Kamehameha, Hawaii.

VON WALLBURG, VILLA.—Last heard of eight years ago at Victoria, Michigan. Can now return your kindness. Please communicate with Dolores Goff, care of this magazine.

BODEY, EARL.—Last seen in Rhinelander, Wisconsin. Please write to your sister. Important news. Dolores Goff, 313 Laurel Avenue, St. Paul, Minnesota.

RITA.—Of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Small, auburn hair. The boy you met in Central Park last summer, who promised to come back the following Sunday and failed to do so, would like to hear from you. Please write to Dick, in care of this magazine.

TRACIE, RAY.—Colored. Left Louana, Arkansas, in 1924. Is fifteen years old. Please write to your sister, Rosie Rogers, Norphlet, Arkansas.

CHILDS, FLORENCE.—Worked in Minneapolis in 1918, and lived with her sister on Willow Avenue N. Would like to hear from you again. Glena H. Smith, Onida, South Dakota.

NYE, ALICE.—When last heard of was living about seven miles from Dayton, Ohio. Anybody knowing where she lives please write to her old friend, Earl Signar, Y. M. C. A., Canton, Ohio.

HUGHES, VERA JACKSON.—Last heard of two years ago in Utah. Please write to your niece, Mrs. Alta Bishop Bennett, R. R. 9, Columbus, Indiana.

Have You Read

Far West Illustrated Magazine?

Formerly True Western Stories

Stories and articles by the best Western authors. :: *Pictures of the West*

Published monthly 25c a copy

$100 a Week is waiting for you

700 Men and Women Wanted at Once—We Furnish All Equipment—Experience Not Necessary

If you want $100 a week clear profit, if you want $5,000 a year without working as hard or as long as you do now, I'll show you how to get it. I'll prove to you that $10 a day is easy, that $15, $20, or even $25 a day is possible. You can start immediately, without experience, without investment and without delay. And, besides your large cash earnings, you can get a new Hudson Super-Six Coach FREE.

$125 In One Week

I will give you the same offer I made to Christopher Vaughn whose earnings have reached $125 in a week, and Frank M. Brown who formerly worked 12 hours a day for $25 a week. He accepted my offer and was amazed to find that he could make $27 in an eight-hour day. You can do like John Scotti who started without experience and made $97 his second week, or Mrs. K. R. Roof who has two children and does her own housework, yet in her spare time has made $50 in a week and $15 in a single afternoon. Yes, profits like these can be yours. Do you want them?

Big Profits For Easy Work

All you need to do is to accept my offer to handle our dealings with our customers in your community. We have customers in a million homes throughout America—hundreds of them right around you. These customers of ours know and like and use ZANOL Products—delicious foods, delightful toilet preparations, perfumes, soaps and household necessities—more than 350 different products in all.

But ZANOL Products are never sold in stores. They are sold only through our own representatives. You can be one of them. Our representatives will make two million dollars as their profits this year, and you can have your share. You will be amazed at how easy it is, and how quickly the money rolls in. You will realize that $100 a week is not hard if you are in the right line.

I Furnish Everything

If you want your share of these big profits all you need do now is write. You won't believe how easy it is nor what wonderful profits you can make until you get started and the money begins to roll in.

We furnish all of our people with complete equipment for doing business. We furnish it free. We tell you in detail exactly what to do. We make it easy for you. We help you in every way to get started quick and to make big profits without waiting or delay.

You will be given the same proposition that has brought thousands of dollars in cash to E. S. Shelly, of Pennsylvania; Mrs. Nona Kern, of Mississippi; Edgar Banville, of Massachusetts; and dozens of others. It has enabled G. C. Henry to make four times as much money as he ever did on a farm and G. A. Becker, of Iowa, to earn more than he did in 22 years in the grocery business.

Send No Money

Just send me your name and I will tell you how to get started. I will give you all the details. I will show you how you can make $100 a week and even in your spare time $8 to $10 a day for a few hours' work. I will show you how you can have a permanent, profitable, honorable, pleasant and fascinating business, that will bring in a bigger income than you ever thought possible. It is your chance to get ahead. It means thousands of dollars to you. And you are not risking a penny. You are not agreeing to pay anything. So mail the coupon. Don't wait until someone else gets in ahead of you. Don't delay until it is too late. Write now.

Cleared $210 in First Two Weeks

$210 his first two weeks. That is the record of Edgar Morris. Since then he has built up a big, steady business that has made him the biggest money-maker in his community.

$27 Profit in One Day

Frank M. Brown of N. Dakota formerly made $25 a week. As the ZANOL Representative he has cleared as much as $27 in a single day and finds it very easy to make from $15 to $20 every day in the week in this pleasant, dignified work.

$50 Profit Her First Week

Mrs. K. R. Roof of South Carolina is the ZANOL Representative in her spare hours. She finds this work pleasant and profitable. Her first week she cleared over $50.

Hudson Coach Free

We want to help you in every way to make large profits and we offer to provide a new Hudson Super-Six Coach without any expense to you whatever. Mail the coupon for details of the plan that will give you this handsome closed car without expense and an income of $100 a week, or more.

THE AMERICAN PRODUCTS CO.
Albert Mills
President and General Manager
Dept. 5515, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Mail This NOW

Albert Mills, Pres., American Products Co.,
Dept. 5515, Cincinnati, Ohio.

I want to make $100 a week. Send me full details of your proposition at once. This does not obligate me.

Name.....

Address.....

.....

© A. P. Co. (Write Plainly)

OUR Tudor Velour Suite GREATEST BARGAIN SPECIAL

See this beautiful 4 Piece Tudor Velour Suite in your own home! Convince yourself of its wonderful value! Admire its graceful, up-to-date, artistic design!

Note how its rich, cheerful velour covering brightens your home and harmonizes with your other furnishings! Enjoy the full comfort of chair and rockers! Delight in the high quality of the rich brown mahogany or fine American walnut finish and then you'll agree that this Suite is the *greatest bargain special of the year!*

Keep this Suite 30 days on trial. Use it every day! Then if you are not simply delighted with it, if you are not entirely satisfied that nowhere else could you get such a bargain—send it back and we will promptly refund every cent you have paid, including freight charges.

We are anxious to send you this Suite on a month's free trial because we sincerely and honestly believe that nowhere can you equal this big special Spear bargain. We don't ask you to risk a cent. If you decide to keep it, take more than a year to pay for it. Could anything be fairer than this?

Send for Big Book FREE

Here's a book—filled from cover to cover with household treasures—all sold on easy payments—sent on 30 days FREE trial. There are wonderful bargains in furniture, carpets, stoves, curtains and household furnishings. Mail coupon today.

MORE THAN A YEAR TO PAY

The luxurious overstuffed Wing Rocker has wide roll arms and a big roomy seat, assuring real comfort. The other rocker and chair are dignified, restful, neat looking pieces—a credit to any home. They are more satisfactory than the heavier, more cumbersome type of living room furniture. The Tudor Davenport Table is of rich design and much more desirable than the old style Library table. The Period design with its neatly shaped top and posts make this table doubly attractive. It is 48 inches long and 18 inches wide.

Rich Velour Covering

The seats of the rocker and chair are built over resilient coil spring supports. The backs and seats are well padded with rest-giving sanitary upholstery materials. The outer covering is a most artistic pattern of two-tone taupe and blue figured velour. This velour is excellent in quality and will give long and satisfactory service. The overstuffed rocker measures 32 inches wide overall. The back is 26 inches high from the seat. The seats of the other chairs are 19 inches square, with backs that are 25 inches high from seat.

$1 WITH ORDER

SALE PRICE ONLY $59.75

Choice of 2 Finishes

This suite is honestly constructed to give splendid service. All pieces are built upon strong, well-seasoned hardwood frames. You have your choice of brown mahogany or rich American walnut finish. Be sure to state your choice. The complete Suite [4 pieces] will be sent on 30 days FREE trial. If you are not entirely satisfied, return it. Your first payment and all transportation costs will be refunded. The trial will not cost you a penny. Order right now from this page. **Order No. WA 4235. Price $59.75. Terms $1 with order, $4 monthly.**

Home Furnishers to the People of America for 35 Years

Nathaniel Spear President

Spear & Co.

Dept. S 205 Pittsburgh, Pa.

SPEAR & CO., Dept. S 205, Pittsburgh, Pa.

Send me at once the 4 Piece Tudor Velour Suite as described above. Enclosed is $1 first payment. It is understood that if at the end of the 30 days trial I am satisfied, I will send you $4 monthly. Order No. WA 4235. Price $59.75. Title remains with you until paid in full.

If you want Brown Mahogany Finish, put an X in this ☐

If you want American Walnut Finish, put an X in this ☐

Name_____

R.F.D., Box or Street and No._____

Post Office_____ State_____

If your shipping point is different from your post office fill in the line below.

Send shipment to_____

FREE CATALOG { If you want Free Catalog Only, Send No Money, put X here ☐ and write your name and address plainly on above lines.

© 1928 Spear & Co.